

DUNSTER FOREST EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MANAGEMENT PLAN

1.1 Description of the woodland(s) in the landscape

The Crown Estate Dunster lies in West Somerset alongside the Bristol Channel. To the south of the estate are the Brendon Hills, whilst to the west is Exmoor. Approximately twenty miles to the south east is the fast expanding market town of Taunton, whilst to the east about twenty miles lies Bridgwater and the M5 motorway. Dunster Forest lies within the Exmoor National park (ENPA) whilst many of the farms lie on the fertile plain between the Brendon Hills and the Bristol Channel.

Composition

- Broadleaved – productive..... 49.04 ha.
- Broadleaved – amenity.....56.21ha
- Broadleaved – immature.....24.64 ha.
- Conifer – productive.....559.75 ha
- Conifer immature.....74.3 ha.
- Open ground..... 34.8 ha.
- Total Area..... 798.74 ha

1.2 History of Management

The Crown Estate purchased the Dunster estate (Croydon Hill) in 1950. The woodlands which formed part of the Luttrell estate were initially managed by the Forestry Commission who extended the tree cover by ploughing and planting the higher ground. The Dunster Castle estate (Hopcott, Periton) was acquired by the Westminster estates during the early 1950's. In 1959 the woodlands and moorland were purchased by members of the Thomson family of Dundee who held the property until acquired by the Rolls Royce Pension trust in 1981. In 1996 the property was purchased by The Crown Estate.

1.3 Long term vision

In the long term, the management vision is to maximise the value of the woodlands to the landscape, sporting, biodiversity and recreational value of the Dunster Estate, enhancing the capital value of the estate and maximising the contribution the woodlands make to the longer term development potential for non agricultural activities.

1.4 Strategy

Forest restructuring will be achieved gradually by following a planned thinning and group felling progression and subsequent restocking or natural regeneration programme. Restructuring will allow the development of a more diverse age structure and so improve the ability of the forest to deliver both quality timber and environmental benefits in the longer term. Conservation interests within the woodland will be maintained and further developed through the sympathetic management of those key habitats identified. The restructuring activities will be phased to improve the protection and management of landscape, enhance public access as appropriate and protect sensitive sites.

1.5 Protecting and enhancing biodiversity

RATIONALE

The aims are to maintain and where possible increase the biodiversity on the Dunster Forest estate, targeting those species and habitats valued both nationally and locally. The plan consists of species/habitats which are known to exist within the forest estate which is under direct management, although any biodiversity issues occurring on adjacent land is taken into consideration during management planning. Any additional species/habitats identified will be entered into the action plan.

1.6 Management of social and cultural values

The Crown Estate's role in the management of ancient monuments is one of protection. Ideally the monument would be encased in ericaceous species or grasses.

Erosion by equestrian or pedestrian traffic will be controlled.

A buffer zone will be maintained around the sites, particularly where any plant species are likely to penetrate the soil horizons with their roots. The buffer zone will extend at least five metres from the edge of the designated monument.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Over the next five years it is proposed that various enhancements to the current public access arrangements will be put into action. These will include improved signage, interpretation and physical access along different types of trail:

PRoW: The existing rights of way network will be kept open and accessible in line with the pertinent legislation and the National Park Management Plan objectives. The Crown Estate will work with its partners in the Somerset County Council and Exmoor National Park Authority to ensure that rights of way are accurately shown on maps, and that signage is kept up to the desired standard. Where faults occur, these will be recorded directly into the County Council reporting system and faults dealt with according to SCC procedures.

Permissive access: There are currently numerous permissive routes, and these will be kept open and accessible. Enhancements will be explored, and links will be identified where appropriate.

Waymarked Trails: The Crown Estate provides and maintains 7 waymarked walking trails, and will be reviewing the current provision of 3 cycle trails, with the aim of improving the visitor experience. The aim with all trails is to enable the visitor to make the most of their visit to the estate, and to provide links with local businesses and services where possible.

Community work: Opportunities for working with the community to get better access into the countryside will be explored, and regular volunteer work parties and events, guided walks programmes and school group visits will all be developed and established by year 5.