

Dunster Estate news



Tallest Trees

A new look for
Conygar Tower

Helping shape
the future of
West Somerset



The Crown Estate and Dunster

MANY PEOPLE MAY NOT BE aware that over 70% of the Dunster Estate is within Exmoor National Park.

Welcome to the first Dunster Estate newsletter which I hope you will find of interest. The newsletter is designed to provide information about some of the recent activities and projects undertaken by The Crown Estate on the Dunster Estate and to highlight the key attractions of the area and the work we will be doing to help take forward the management of the estate in the future. As a large landowner, The Crown Estate strives to deliver a wide range of benefits to the public, through generation of revenue for the Treasury, but also to help deliver local benefits on our estates where we work in partnership with a variety of people, organisations, businesses and communities. On the Dunster Estate we aim to develop and facilitate sustainable land based activities which help promote economic development and enhance and protect the special natural and cultural heritage features which make the area so special. Our strategy is to work in partnership with others to encourage investment in economic, environmental, agricultural, community, recreational and tourism activities, which have long term benefits for the whole area and I hope this newsletter offers a flavour of how this approach is being developed at the local level. We strive to set high standards in the management of the land and buildings that we own and to enhance the livelihoods of our business partners and the communities with whom we interact. We intend to produce further newsletters to keep people informed about our activities and look forward to working with others to make the most of the opportunities that lie ahead.

If you have a business idea that you would like to discuss with us – please give our local office a call. Tel. **01643 821309**

Andrew Wells, *Head of Countryside Management, Rural Estates*

In fact, The Crown Estate's Dunster Estate comprises 4,000 hectares (9,900 acres) of the West Somerset countryside, from rolling moor to open sea.

But what is The Crown Estate? Valued at around £6 billion it manages a wide range of land and properties across the UK. From offices to shops, agricultural land to affordable housing, ancient forests to parkland. And it also owns over half the foreshore and almost the entire seabed around the UK.

In line with the principles first established in 1760 by George III and the Government of the day, the surplus revenue from The Crown Estate goes to the Treasury for the benefit of all UK taxpayers. In return the monarch receives a fixed annual payment, the Civil List. Today its responsibilities are laid down by

Parliament in The Crown Estate Act 1961, which requires it to enhance the value of its land and property and the income they generate through good and responsible management.

From national parks such as Cairngorms and Exmoor, national landmarks such as Regent Street or parts of Britain's national history such as Windsor Great Park, The Crown Estate's properties attract millions of visitors and tourists every year.



Welcome to Andy

A big welcome to Andy Player who has joined the Estate Team as Countryside Manager. Andy will be working alongside Graham Smith who became Head Forester following the retirement of Alvin Houchen.

Andy's role will be to help further develop access facilities, education services, community projects and promote the Dunster Estate. Andy has experience of working for the Forestry Commission in Wales and Surrey, and spent the last three and a half years working as the Trees and Woodlands advisor for the Exmoor National Park Authority. As a resident of Minehead he knows the area well, but is looking forward to getting to know it even better!

New trail brings you closer to England's tallest tree

DID YOU KNOW THAT along Broadwood Road, near Dunster, there is a Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) that has been measured at more than 60m (197ft) tall which makes it the tallest tree in the country?



To celebrate this, The Crown Estate has designed an all-abilities Tall Trees Trail that will snake its way past the tallest tree and its lofty companions, so that people can get a true sense of the scale of these amazing living giants.

The new trail will link with the extensive existing trail network, and provides an additional 300m of track suitable for wheelchairs and buggies – all within easy reach of the popular Nutcombe Bottom car park.



With bridges made from timber grown in the Dunster Estate's sustainably managed forests, and signage also made from Exmoor's certified woodlands, this is an attractive and environmentally friendly addition to the facilities available on the Dunster Estate.



Highlights

- **Gallox Bridge:** a medieval packhorse bridge that crosses the River Avill and was being used hundreds of years before Henry VIII came to the throne.
- **Bats Castle:** remnant of a circular enclosure that dates from the Iron Age (100-400BC) and would have been home to a Warrior Chief, his people and their livestock. Today it is accessible via waymarked trails and offers spectacular views of Dunster, Dunkery Beacon and the surrounding Exmoor and West Somerset coast and countryside.
- **Black Hill:** a 200 acre (81ha) area of open heathland on the edge of Dunster Forest and also part of our waymarked trails. From here you can see far across the Bristol Channel to the Brecon Beacons.
- **Nutcombe Bottom car park:** with space for 40 cars and a short distance from Dunster, offers a play and picnic area and is the start of many of our waymarked trails.

All of these are fully open to the public, and people of all abilities and ages are encouraged to explore and enjoy the special qualities of this unique estate.

The following are a few examples of enterprises that can be found on the Dunster Estate, and whose products and services will help you to enjoy the Estate even more:

- **Styles Ice Cream:** David and Sue Baker produce a wide range of luxury ice creams, sorbets and bottled spring water. Their desserts use locally sourced, high quality ingredients, and even include a range of low fat iced desserts made from local sheep's milk called Slim Ewe! Styles Ice Cream employs up to 70 people in summer months, and their vans can be seen selling and delivering ice cream at not only key Exmoor visitor attractions, but to other parts of the country as well. So when you are tucking into a Styles Ice Cream this summer, remember you are experiencing a taste of the Dunster Estate! For further information see www.styles-icecream.co.uk



- **Barle Valley Safaris:** Founded in 1998 by Alison Simms & Duncan Waller, Barle Valley Safaris has so far enabled 21,000 people of all abilities to see the amazing scenery and wildlife of Exmoor. Since 2008 their Land Rover tours have incorporated routes through the Dunster Estate where the mix of moorland and different woodland types provides habitat for a diverse range of species. The Barle Valley Safaris team offer local knowledge, photo opportunities and a unique way to experience the Dunster Estate. For further information see www.exmoorwildlifesafaris.co.uk

- **Exmoor Llamas:** Local husband and wife team, Chris and Tracey Glasspool brought Llamas to the Dunster Estate in 2009. Offering treks through the forest that last for a couple of hours, or for even longer if you wish to explore further, the Llamas will provide a unique travel companion. The business is new to the Estate this year, and the couple hope that visitors and locals will take the opportunity to get to know these lovable creatures, and see more of the Dunster Estate as part of the bargain. For booking information see www.ExmoorLlamas.co.uk



Conserving one of Britain's rarest trees

THE CROWN ESTATE is helping to conserve one of Britain's rarest trees, the black poplar.

The black poplar has been a traditional part of the West Somerset landscape, with mature or even ancient specimens found in local hedgerows, particularly on low lying, wetter ground.

Historically, only male trees were planted, as females were considered a nuisance due to the drifting white down they produce. The combined factors of a lack of parent trees in the wild, the very particular undisturbed, wetland conditions required for seedling growth, and the lack of replacement planting, have led to a rapid decline of the black poplar.

During the winter of 2008/09, students from West Somerset

Community College helped The Crown Estate, under the guidance of Triscombe Nurseries, to take cuttings from a native black poplar. These cuttings are being propagated at the college's new Rural Skills centre at Triscombe Nurseries and should be ready for planting out in the local area this coming planting season.

Further cuttings will be taken in subsequent years, with the aim of providing a ready supply for anyone who is interested in conserving Britain's rarest native timber tree.

Contact the estate office for more information on the black poplar, and how to source native black poplar for your planting schemes.



Phase 1 will include the strategic felling of trees to allow better views out and better visibility into the tower from the A39. Discrete vistas overlooking Dunster village will also be created and rustic benches will be installed at these locations. Improved waymarking and information points will allow visitors to get a better understanding of the history and the surrounding environment.

Phase 2 will focus on some of the other historic features, such as the arches, open up further vistas around the wood, control invasive species and install further rustic seating at appropriate locations.

All of the work is being undertaken in full consultation with our partners at the Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England, National Trust, English Heritage and the local community. Rights of way will remain open during the work period, though for safety, visitors are reminded to keep dogs on leads at all times and observe any instructions given on site.

A new look for Conygar

CONYGAR WOOD IS A PROMINENT FEATURE of the landscape around Minehead and Dunster and is part of the spectacular panorama that forms the gateway to Exmoor.

The 60ft tall, Conygar Tower crowns the hilltop, and dates back to 1775. At this time the wood was designed as a 'pleasure ground', and would have included the tower, rustic seats at strategic viewpoints, 'ruined' arches, a summer house and a statue of Neptune that could be seen from the sea.

Today much of this history is lost or obscured and so The Crown Estate has undertaken a two phase approach to reinstate the wood and tower back to some of its former glory.



Sensitive, sustainable, collaborative

By Nick Harper, Head of Rural Asset Management and Development

Over the next 15 years West Somerset District Council will need to find sites for 2,500 new homes. Finding suitable sites that allow high quality, sustainable development is likely to be a challenge for the Council.

As one of the biggest landowners in the district The Crown Estate believes it has a duty to work with the Council and other local stakeholders to look at potential landholdings that may help deliver some of the new housing.

The Prince's Foundation event was the first step in this process. The conclusions from the workshop will be published in our next newsletter where we will begin to set out the next steps in this process. Our approach to new development will be driven by three key principles: sensitivity to the local environment and landscape, sustainable long term development that offers a high quality living environment, and collaborative working with local stakeholders.

We believe this is an exciting opportunity for West Somerset and are looking forward to helping them deliver a sustainable future for the district.



Helping shape the future of West Somerset

THE CROWN ESTATE IS WORKING in conjunction with the Prince's Foundation to explore how it can help deliver new homes for the local community in West Somerset.

The Foundation recently held a workshop (March 2009) with local councillors and residents to discuss how The Crown Estate could work with the local community to provide some of the new housing West Somerset District Council needs to find as part of preparing its future plan for the district (the Local Development Framework). The Council needs to find sites for 2,500 new homes by 2026.

While the Council's main focus for development will be in and around Minehead, The Crown Estate, as a major landowner, could provide some of the new housing on its land.

The workshop provided an opportunity to look at the key issues and opportunities in the area and topics such as tourism, employment and transport, were discussed, alongside how to meet the area's housing needs.

There were a series of presentations from The Crown Estate, the Prince's Foundation and West Somerset Council, as well as input from Exmoor National Park, a local historian and an affordable housing expert.

Feedback from the day was positive. David Baker of Styles

Farm said “It was good to see The Crown Estate planning and looking forward to identifying where the area, its profitability and protection will go. The area has great potential.”

William Wake, the National Trust Property Manager at Dunster Castle said he would like to improve tourism in the area, and that the National Trust are “keen to work with The Crown Estate on developing and providing the area with a clear marketing approach.”

Kevin Sully, Chairman of Dunster Parish Council said he found the day “very interesting and informative”.

The conclusions from the day will be put forward to West Somerset Council for inclusion in its emerging plans for the district.



Sustainable management in the forest



FSC Trademark © 1996 Forest Stewardship Council A.C. Certificate SGS-FM/COC-0535

The forests and woodlands within The Crown Estate’s Dunster Estate extend to some 1,427 hectares (3,526 acres) and consist of a mixture of native trees such as oak and beech and other species, including pines, cedars and Douglas Firs.

The Crown Estate’s approach to managing the forest meets the highest standards for sustainability set by the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard. The scheme sets out approaches to producing sustainable timber, assessing environmental impacts, and protecting and improving important species and habitats.

Reshaping the forest

As part of the forest management, The Crown Estate is planning to redress an imbalance in the age class distribution of the commercial coniferous plantations.

“If a traditional approach to felling the trees was adopted, then large areas would be felled at the same time, this would dramatically change the landscape and affect the sustainability of wildlife habitat.”

Graham Smith, *Forest Manager*

Large areas planted in the 1950s early 1960s will reach clearfell age sometime in the 2020s. The work to re-structure these areas has already begun, the objective is to develop a more diverse age class structure by felling small groups no more than 0.2ha in area. These areas will be re-stocked by natural regeneration. This will create a more stable habitat and also increase the biodiversity of the forest and ensure the visual impact of felling is minimised.



The Prince’s Foundation

The Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment is an educational charity which exists to improve the quality of people’s lives by teaching and practising timeless and ecological ways of planning, designing and building. The Crown Estate is working with the The Foundation’s Education Programme which teaches skills in successful place-making through seminars and workshops.

More information can be found at www.princes-foundation.org



Cover: Dunkery Beacon from
Bats Castle

London

The Crown Estate
16 New Burlington Place
London W1S 2HX
Tel: 020 7851 5090

Edinburgh

The Crown Estate
6 Bell's Brae
Edinburgh EH4 3BJ
Tel: 0131 260 6070

Windsor

The Crown Estate
The Great Park
Windsor
Berkshire SL4 2HT
Tel: 01753 860 222

Dunster Forestry Office

Loxhole Sawmill
Dunster
Minehead
Somerset TA24 6NY
Tel: 01643 821 309

If you require alternative formats, such as Braille or audio, please contact the communications department on 020 7851 5070.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Dunster factfile:

- The Dunster Estate comprises 4,000 hectares (9,900 acres) of the West Somerset countryside and lies mostly within Exmoor National Park.
- Settlements on the estate date back to 350BC, though the actual development of the estate began in 1066 when Dunster Castle was built by William de Mohun. The estate was further developed by the Luttrell family (1370s-1950s), who made Dunster Castle as it stands today, along with the Deer Park, Conygar Tower and the Dunster Water Mill.
- The Crown Estate has owned the Dunster Estate since the 1950s and it primarily comprises prime agricultural and forest land.
- The National Trust acquired the Dunster Castle in 1976.
- The Crown Estate welcomes walkers to explore our three waymarked walking trails, which vary from a 1.5 mile gentle stroll amongst the forest trees, to a 9 mile route that takes the more adventurous walker up to the breathtaking views on Black Hill and Bats Castle.
- Cyclists are also welcome to enjoy one of our three cycle trails, that vary from a mile long family trail, to the 6 mile long intermediate trail, or the 9 mile explorer trail.
- Trails can be accessed from Nutcombe Bottom car park, or from Dunster Village, and connect up to the 1000km long Exmoor National Park rights of way network. This means you can enjoy the Dunster Estate as part of a longer trek, on foot, bike or horseback, across this unique area of historic interest and natural beauty.