

National Forest Background to New Policy NR11

1. The Local Plan Strategy identifies the National Forest as one of the District's significant assets. Whilst most of the National Forest lies beyond Lichfield District, Alrewas is a gateway to the Forest and home to the National Memorial Arboretum. The National Forest is a landscape orientated initiative working across 200 square miles of the Midlands. It seeks to restore and transform the landscape following the closure of many extractive industries and link the two ancient forests of Charnwood and Needwood.
2. The Local Plan Strategy recognises the Forest as containing sustainably managed local woodland (Policy SC2), an existing tourist attraction (CP9) which contributes to the local economy and regeneration through a range of leisure, woodland recreation and biodiversity opportunities which enhance the landscape and create valuable new habitats increase biodiversity value in the District and help to safeguard our ecological networks and prevent further loss (CP13, NR3, NR4, NR5, NR6). The existing Local Plan Strategy requires a high quality design, tree planting, landscaping and green spaces as part of new development and elsewhere to improve the quality of place in the National Forest (CP14 and BE1) and its connectivity (Alr1).
3. The saved policy sought the establishment of the National Forest and sought to encourage applicants to provide trees and woodland planting to enhance the existing landscape. Since this policy was adopted in 1998 the National Forest Company have been working with the other local authorities in the National Forest and have established a Guide for Developers and Planners which seeks to deliver tree planting on site (if possible) on sites for residential development of over 0.5Ha and commercial development in excess of 1ha. The standard has been adopted by all other authorities in The National Forest.
4. Within the Local Plan Strategy policy NR3: Biodiversity, Protected Species and their Habitats requires developments to deliver a net gain for biodiversity and / or geodiversity in the district and how net gain is calculated is explained in the Biodiversity and Development SPD. The Biodiversity and Development SPD requires an assessment of the losses/gains to biodiversity occurring through development to be measured in 'biodiversity units' to ensure any compensatory habitat creation is of greater value. The method of calculating 'biodiversity units' whilst a relatively new approach is recognised widely within the specialism and by Natural England and Defra and is currently used in assessing planning applications.

5. The National Forest Company have assessed a number of planning applications using the current District Council approach within the Biodiversity and Development SPD and are satisfied that in the majority of circumstances the approach would deliver the level of planting they seek for sites within the National Forest and accord with their planting guidelines and thus the adopted policies in other local authority areas. However there are circumstances where Policy NR3 would not deliver the aspirations of The National Forest Company. This could be on sites which do not have a measurable quantitative biodiversity value, an example would be a site which is clear of buildings but a hardstanding remains. Whilst it is unlikely a new planning permission would be given which did not include landscaping it would accord with the Council's objectives of delivering landscape enhancements within the National Forest if additional landscaping appropriate to the locality and which assisted in the delivery of the National Forest was sought. It is therefore appropriate for an alternative approach and new policy supporting the delivery of the National Forest to be sought.
6. The Policy therefore seeks to deliver landscaping enhancement on sites within the National Forest area, however to achieve this it is necessary to agree with the National Forest Company the equivalent to their Planting Guidelines in biodiversity units to be consistent with the Local Plan Strategy and up to date guidance and to agree the type of landscaping . The policy therefore proposes that development where landscaping would normally be provided will have a focus of creating Forest habitat and tree planting where appropriate. The current Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping for the area of the National Forest within Lichfield District shows that the area of the National Forest as 'farmland'. The Council's Ecologists have advised that there is no conflict between the objectives of the National Forest and the Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping. They have advised that where there is no existing habitat within the site then the landscaping required by this proposed policy can be delivered in a variety of ways. This could include Forest habitat planting within the site, the enhancement of existing woodland planting in the area, the creation of small copses and increased tree planting within hedgerows and any of these would contribute positively to both the objectives of the Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping and The National Forest Company.
7. The following approach to the reconciliation of the Planting Guidelines has been suggested:

The existing National Forest policy relates to residential developments over 0.5ha and industrial, commercial and leisure developments over 1ha. Depending on the scale of development, either 20% or 30% of the site area would be expected to be provided as National Forest woodland planting and landscaping.

It has been agreed with the National Forest Company to convert this requirement into Biodiversity Units within the District.

8. The type of landscaping required as part of the National Forest woodland planting and landscaping has also been considered by the Council’s Ecologists. Their analysis concluded that the type of woodland planting and landscaping promoted by the National Forest Company often comprises of broadleaved plantation woodland as this supports the objectives of the Forest to deliver more tree cover and it forms a robust environment for promoting access to woodland, such as the creation of a small copse where children can play and dogs can be walked. When considering this in the context of biodiversity units and the Biodiversity Metric this type of landscaping would be categorized as being in poor condition as regards ecological conservation. Due to the nature of the area and limited public access there is potential for other types of woodland to be suitable such as broadleaved woodland which requires a range of English native species and would also provide a better fit to the objectives of the Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping. The use of biodiversity units would enable the creation of the most suitable habitat and would facilitate, for example the expansion of a woodland plantation with new broadleaved plantation woodland or the creation of a copse of trees in the corner of a site dependent upon what was the most suitable for the site.

9. The National Forest Company have agreed that for the purposes of the calculation, the calculation should be based on a nominal Forest habitat consisting of 75% broadleaved woodland and 25% neutral semi-improved grassland and this is considered to be an appropriate habitat to create in this part of the District. It is important to note that the type of landscaping will be determined on a site by site basis, however it is appropriate to set a mathematical benchmark.

10. The biodiversity unit value of nominal Forest habitat is calculated as follows:

Forest Habitat	Minimum Condition	BU Value per hectare	% in nominal Forest habitat	BU Value per ha.
Broadleaved woodland	Poor	6	75%	4.5
Neutral semi-improved grassland	Poor	4	25%	1
Total				5.5

11. The ‘poor minimum condition’ is representative of the minimum management condition required as explained in paragraph 8 above and can be exceeded through negotiations. It is also worthy of note that this will still deliver an increase in the biodiversity value and landscape value of the sites where this

policy will apply i.e the sites which have no biodiversity value and are likely to be sites which have been cleared of buildings and where only hardstanding remains.

12. The policy will be applied by firstly calculating the net gain in biodiversity expected by Local Plan Strategy policy NR3 as explained in the Biodiversity and Development SPD. Within the National Forest, if this calculation does not exceed the minimum value acceptable as set out below, then the minimum value acceptable figure should be provided by the development.

Development	Site Area	% of site area required as National Forest planting	Equivalent in BU per ha.	Minimum Value acceptable
Residential	0.5ha - 10ha	20%	5.5 x 20% =	1.1 BU/ha
Industrial, commercial and leisure developments	1ha - 10ha	20%	5.5 x 20% =	1.1 BU/ha
All development	10ha+	30%	5.5 x 30% =	1.65 BU/ha

13. This level of provision has been sought from sites elsewhere in the National Forest and has not been considered too onerous by developers. It is therefore proposed this calculation and an explanatory background would be added as an appendix to the Biodiversity SPD and also accords with the objectives of the Trees, Landscaping and Development SPD and the National Forest Company's Guide for Developers for Planners.