

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Independent Forestry Panel Report

4 July 2012

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Caroline Spelman) I am grateful to Bishop James Jones and all the Panel Members for their considerable work, detailed consideration and sound advice on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England. I very much welcome their Report. I would also like to thank the many groups and individuals who contributed to the Panel's thinking in the course of their work – their role has been important.

Forests and woodlands are an important part of our heritage and future, and I want to see them make an increased contribution to the environment, economic-growth and personal wellbeing and for everyone to enjoy the many benefits they offer. We know that people feel passionately about forestry and the Panel's report has given us a vision for how a more vibrant future for England's woods and forests can be achieved.

The Natural Environment White Paper set out our vision which placed nature at the centre of the choices our nation must make. By properly valuing nature today, we can safeguard the natural areas that we all cherish and from which we derive vital services. We stated an ambition for a major increase in the area of woodland in England, better management of existing woodlands, and a renewed commitment to conserving and restoring ancient woodlands. The Panel's advice will help us to achieve this. The Panel's report shows clearly how forestry has the potential to offer more in terms of green products and green jobs, often in rural economies.

The Panel's work will also inform the future of the Public Forest Estate, a key component of our English woodland network. I therefore agree with the Panel that the Public Forest Estate should continue to benefit from public ownership. A well managed and publicly owned estate provides the sort of public benefits we need to protect – such as access and biodiversity.

But I also agree with the IPF that the way that the Estate is cared for and managed should evolve to meet the challenges ahead of us. We need a new model that is able to draw in private finance, make best use of Government funding and a means to facilitate wider and more comprehensive community support.

The Government will now need time to properly consider the work of the Panel – we will respond more fully by January 2013 and I look forward to working with the many interested organisations in the development of this response. While we will consider our detailed response we will continue with the general suspension of sales of estate land. In the meantime, we expect

the Forestry Commission to continue to manage the estate to deliver the most public benefits.