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For immediate release

Damian Hinds
MP for East Hampshire

News Release

Announcement of Public Meeting on Forestry Consultation in Alton, 11 March

Following the publication of the Government's consultation document on the future of the Forestry Commission, Damian Hinds has announced that on the evening of the 11th of March he will host a special public meeting in Alton to discuss and coordinate East Hampshire's response.

The twelve week consultation period began last week and will close on the 21st of April.

Damian Hinds said

"The Secretary of State has committed herself to this being a genuine consultation with no predetermined outcome - we certainly know there will be immense scrutiny of the results.

While I am very glad that having the consultation document means we can move away from some of the speculation over the Government's proposals, I believe there is still much uncertainty about some of the proposals and some of that uncertainty is relevant to our own much-loved local woodlands including Chawton Park Woods, Bushy Leaze, Queen Elizabeth Country Park and Alice Holt.

I remain concerned about the distinction between 'heritage forests' and others. It is not yet clear to me exactly what the criteria are for being a heritage forest.

With the document placing so much emphasis on heritage forests, I feel it is even more important to clarify the protections for others which also have crucial community value.

Though I felt that having the debate in Parliament in only the first week of the consultation was not the right timing, last week's Opposition Day Debate did give an opportunity for the strength of concern on these issues to be given a full hearing.

I am absolutely committed to doing everything I can to ensure that we do not lose an inch of accessible woods open for us to enjoy. Part of making sure we protect access is making sure that we respond, loud and clear, to the consultation.

The meeting is expected to be held in the Alton Maltings Centre at 7.30pm on 11 March. These details can be found on www.damianhinds.com, where there is also a link to the government consultation papers."

ENDS

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