



**Damian Hinds**  
*MP for East Hampshire*

## Statement from Damian Hinds

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For immediate release

### **Damian Hinds Statement on the Forestry Estate**

There has been some confusion recently concerning plans for the future management of the forest estate and possible sale of forest estate land. DEFRA, the government department, plan a consultation to begin soon on the future role of Government, charities, the private sector and local communities in the management of our forests.

Separately, there is also a current planning application relating to land bordering Chawton Park Wood. I have spoken to the Land Agent for the Forestry Commission and, whatever one's view on the particular planning application, I have been assured that it has been in train for many months and is not in any way related to the Spending Review or DEFRA's proposals. As I understand it, the Commission periodically selling relatively small parcels of land is not a new thing.

Turning to the broader question: when considering the future of the national forest estate we have to bear in mind that our public forests, heaths and common land are much more than just a 'natural resource'. They are a treasured recreational facility and vital for biodiversity. DEFRA are not looking to simply mark up and sell off our national inheritance for a profit, but rather to consider different ways that woodlands can be owned and managed – which could be by a charity, local government, a community group or the private sector. I understand that the proposals include provision that in some cases forestry land could be turned over to voluntary sector groups free.

The Forestry Commission is currently run with more than £70 million in tax payers' money and most of its land is located in remote areas of Scotland. Of course we all want to ensure our national forests are protected for the generations to come but it is also legitimate to ask the question – are we going about this in the best way?

I am assured that in any new ownership arrangements, public rights of way and access will be protected, statutory protection for wildlife will remain in force and there will be grant incentives for new planting that can be applied for. This is essential; the aim must be to find the best, most efficient way of preserving our woodland for our local communities and for generations to come and not to do anything to put these much loved community resources at risk. When publishing its proposals the government will explore further the options for securing and increasing the wide range of public benefits currently delivered by public ownership and how they might be achieved at lower cost.

ENDS

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