



Summary of a survey of the views of 38 Degrees' supporters on the future of England's woods and forests.

Toplines:

- Just under 90% of those surveyed (1,292 respondents - including people from across the UK, but predominantly England) are ready to campaign against the Government if their concerns about and hopes for their public woods and forests are not met.
- Over 98% want to see an end to short-termist political interference with our public woods and forests.
- Nearly 90% felt that our public woods and forests merited Government (i.e. public taxpayer) support.
- 65% of people were prepared to contribute a minimum of £5.00 (33% from £5.00 - £10.00) to more than £10.00 (32%) per year as taxpayers (current settlement granted to Public Forest Estate amounts to c. 30p per taxpayer per annum).
- 91% felt the Forestry Commission was *'needed to look after our woods and forests'*.
- 86% of those surveyed support **Our Forests'** Vision for 'one billion more trees'.
- 87% of people supported a doubling of England's overall tree-cover from 10% to 20% over next 50 years.

1. Background and approach

Following the unprecedented response from the public to the Government's proposals to sell or dispose of the public woods and forests that make up the Public Forest Estate (PFE) in England, a small group of environmental campaigners, professional foresters and grassroots activists combined forces to form the 'ginger group', **Our Forests**.

The aims of **Our Forests** are to ensure that the public's concerns and aspirations for our woods and forests are taken into account by the Government-appointed Independent Panel on Forestry, to persuade the NGO community to adopt a more proactive stance on the issue in line with the public's concern, and to put forward a positive Vision for all of England's woods and forests.

In order to find out whether that Vision accorded with what people who are passionate about forests and woods want for the future, the group engaged with members of 38 Degrees via a focus group and through conducting a modest but robust on-line survey that yielded statistically significant results. These activities harnessed the considerable reach and experience of 38 Degrees in bringing together a wide cross-section of people to take action on issues that matter to them (534,000 people signed up to 38 Degrees on-line petition to 'Save Our Forests!').

1.1 The Focus Group

A group of 17 people met with representatives of **Our Forests** and 38 Degrees in Oxford on 30th April, 2012 over an informal dinner to discuss their visions for forests in England. A few had read the Vision document, some read it over dinner, but most spoke freely about their concerns and their hopes for woodlands and forests in the future. Their views helped shape the final version of the survey questions.

1.2 The survey

- The survey comprised 14 multiple-choice questions and three free-text questions.
- Questions were framed in the format usually used by 38 Degrees.
- Members of 38 Degrees were invited to participate in the survey by direct email.
- A link to the survey was also made available through a number of widely read Blogs.
- The survey was live for two weeks: from Friday May 18th until Friday June 1st.

2. Results

2.1 Focus Group

The evening comprised two separate groups, who discussed a wide range of views and put forward ideas for a future of forestry that ranged from a 'minimum' requirement that Britain's public woods and forests should stay in public ownership for future generations, to more radical suggestions that private woodland owners should be required to 'open up' their woodlands to provide more public benefits.

There was clear consensus on the need to retain a large amount of woods and forests in public ownership and to separate their management from short-term political cycles.

People generally had no strong views about selling timber from the PFE, or managing the PFE for economic gain, but they valued the access they already had and were in favour of extending this.

The group contained some people who had knowledge of woodland management, and their suggestions of bridging the gap between forestry and agriculture were favourably received by others, who had not thought about this matter before. Similarly, ideas about involving the public in monitoring trees for signs of disease and pest attack were enthusiastically endorsed.

Members of the group almost all thought that a greater proportion of their taxes were directed to the PFE and expressed amazement at the very small sums that were spent on domestic forestry, compared with other areas of public interest.

A thread that ran through both groups was a sense of a very strong connection with woods and forest that was hard to define but universally felt. This connection encompassed the spiritual and the historical together with a genuine belief that well-being was improved through contact with trees and forests.

2.2 Survey responses

Table I. Survey questions and numbers of responses

	# responses
Total number of people taking the survey	1292
1. Should England aim to plant 1 billion more trees in the next 50 years?	1264
2. Should England aim to go from having 10% to 20% covered by woodland in the next 50 years?	1272
3. How much do you think we need the Forestry Commission to look after our woods and forests?	1266
4. Do you think England's public forests should be kept out of party politics?	1261
5. How do you think England's public forests should be paid for?	1251
6. Do you think that England's public forests are well looked after?	1259
7. How much would you be willing to pay for England's public forests to be properly looked after so that they are still there for future generations to use?	1253
8. If you are willing to pay more than 30p each year, please say how much more?	1183
9. Do you think local people would benefit if private woods were better looked after?	1243
10. Do you think England could reduce its carbon emissions if private woods were better looked after?	1232
11. Do you think wildlife would benefit if private woods were better looked after?	1251
12. Have you read the Our Forests Vision report? *	1251
13. What did you like about the vision report?	455
14. What did you dislike about the vision report?	277
15. What would you add into the vision report?	278
16. If the Government's response to the Independent Panel on Forestry's recommendations on the future of English forests does not fit these ideas for protecting forests for future generations, would you campaign again on this issue?	1228
17. If you're happy to, please say which party you think you'd vote for at the next general election, if you're planning to vote?	1065

***Our Forests' Vision** document can be found here: <http://saveourwoods.co.uk/our-forests/our-forests-vision-for-englands-woods-and-forests/>

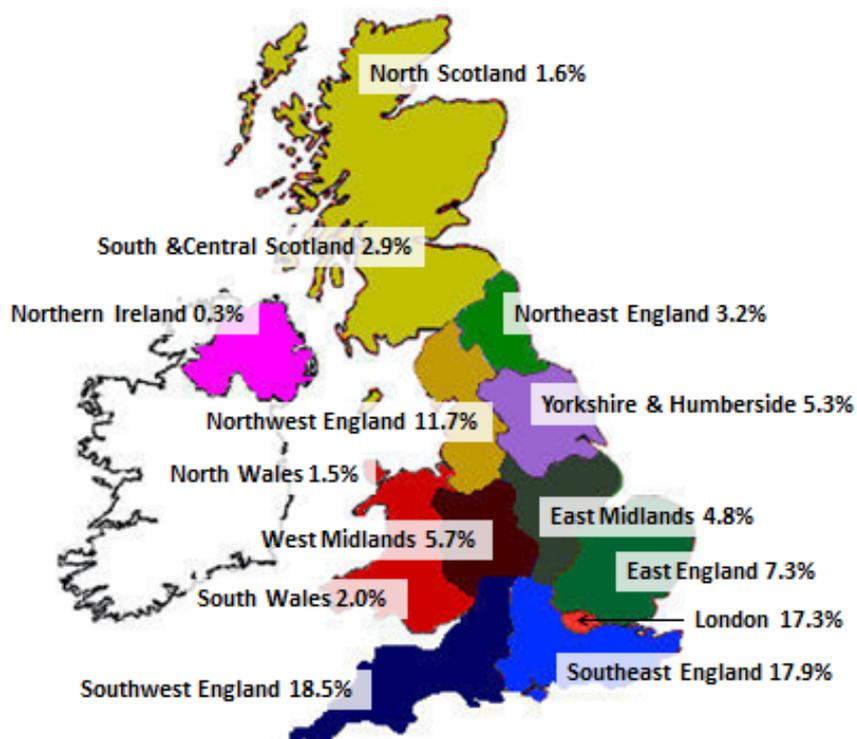


Fig 1.
Geographical spread of responses

2.3 Graphical representation of results

2.3.1 Increasing trees and forest cover

Plant a billion trees over next 50 years?

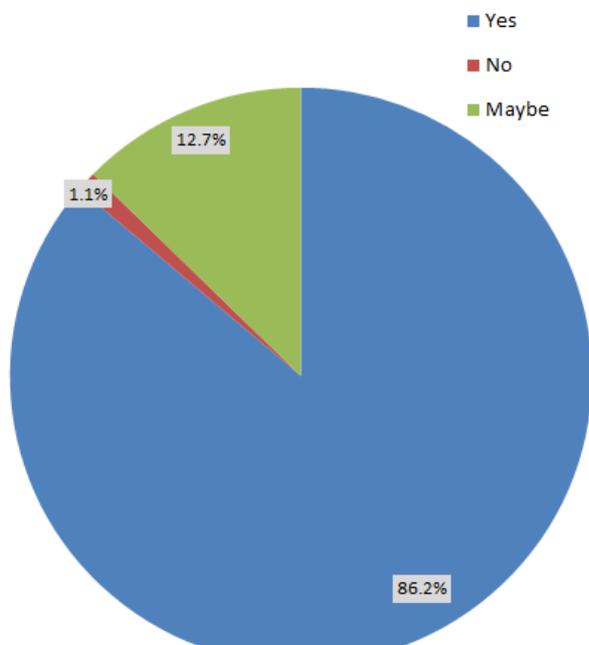


Fig 2. Planting more trees

Extend forest cover over next 50 years?

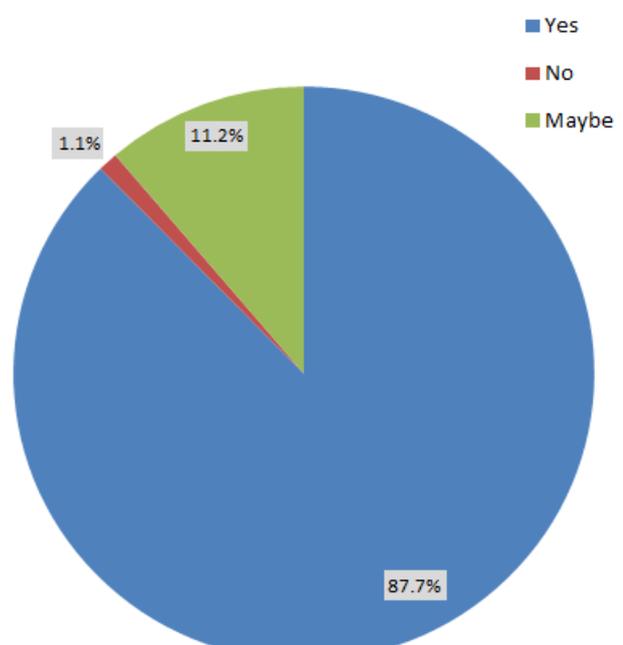


Fig 3. Increasing forest cover

2.3.2 Paying for the Public Forest Estate

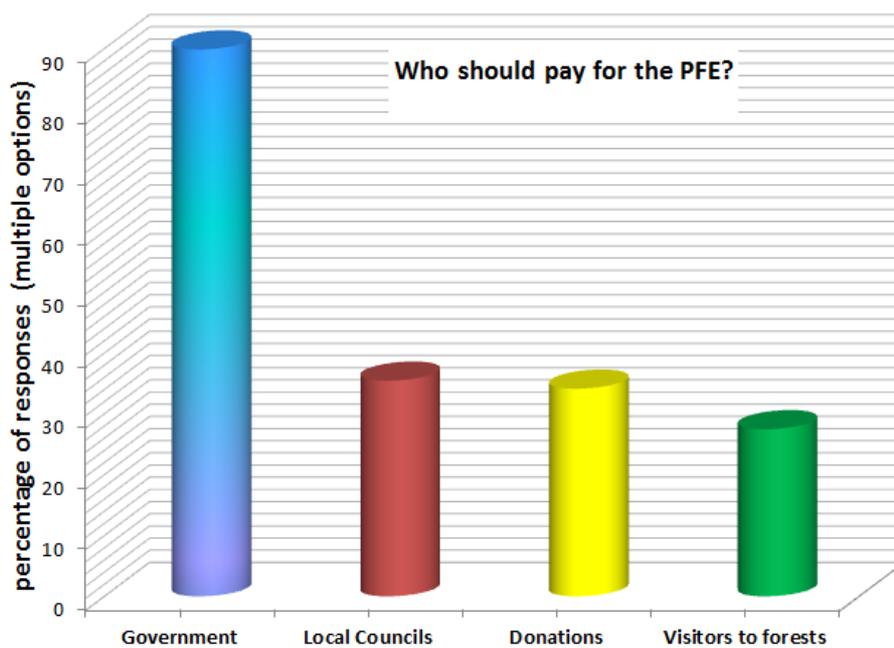


Fig 4. Who should pay for public forests?

2.3.3 Paying for the Public Forest Estate through taxes

Would you pay more, less or the same?

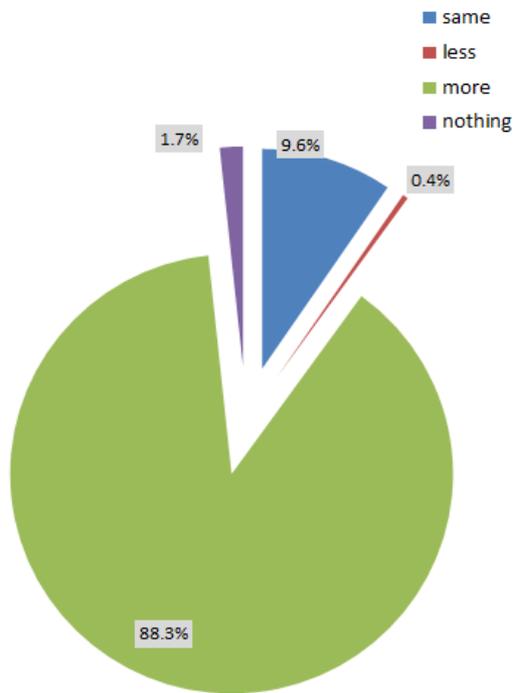


Fig 5. Willingness to pay more tax

How much more in taxes would you pay per year?

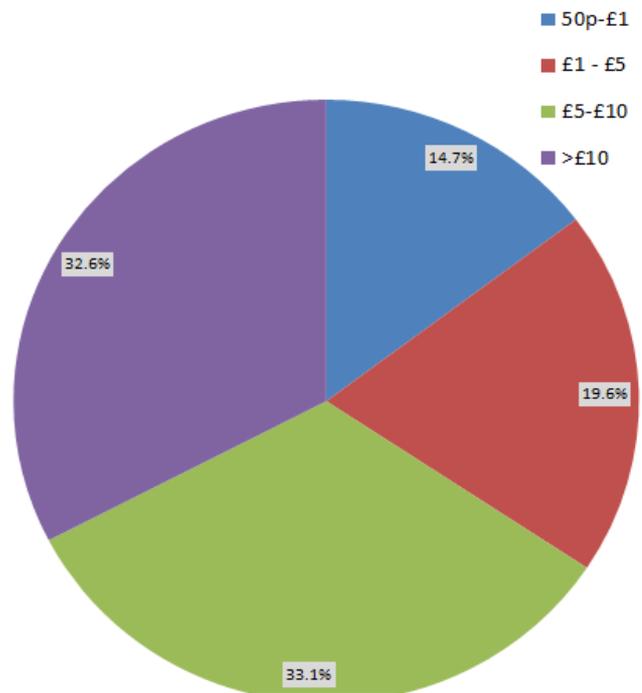


Fig 6. How much more tax people would pay

2.3.4 Management of the Public Forest Estate and Politics

Keep politics out of public forests ?

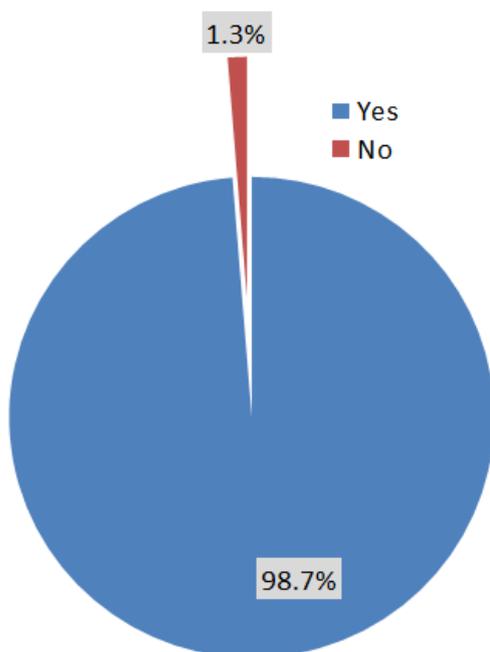


Fig 7. Should politics be kept out of forestry?

2.3.4 Management of the Public Forest Estate and Politics

Are public forests well looked after?

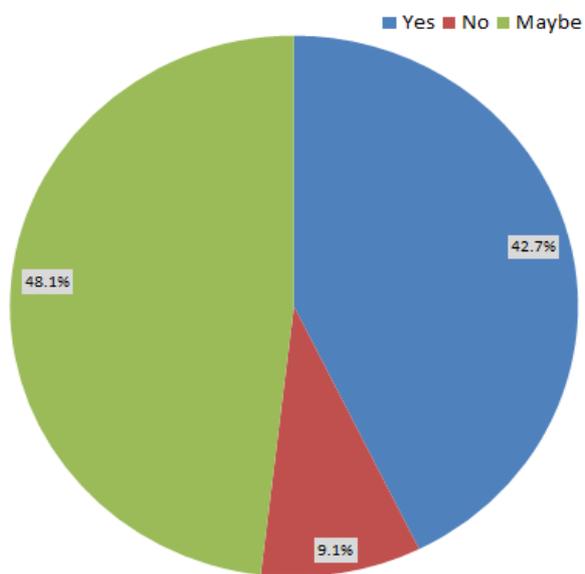


Fig 8. Is the PFE well managed?

How much do we need the Forestry Commission?

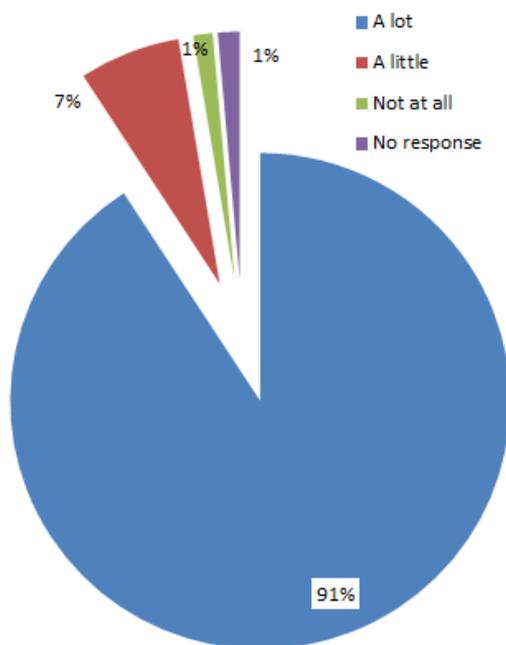


Fig 9. Do we need the Forestry Commission?

2.3.5 Management of Private Forests

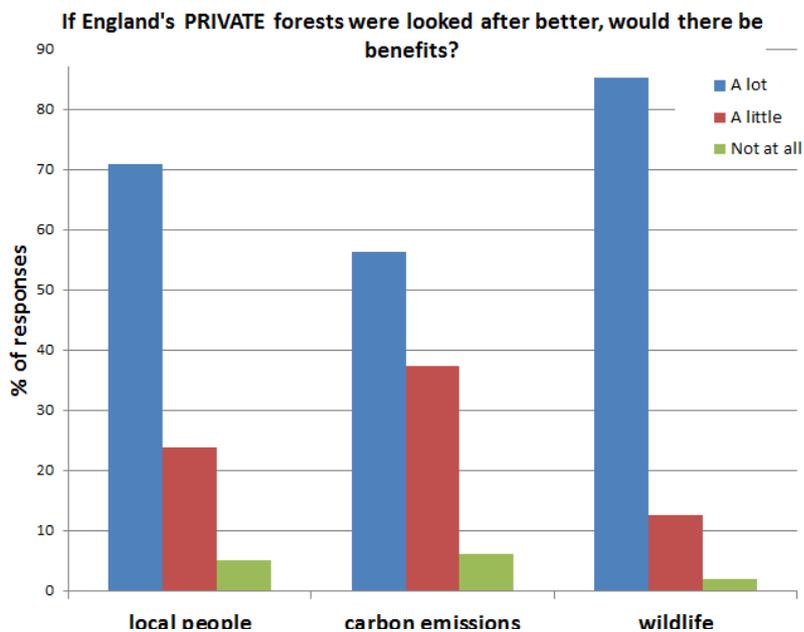


Fig 10. Would there be public benefits if private forests were better managed?

2.3.6 Campaigning and voting intentions

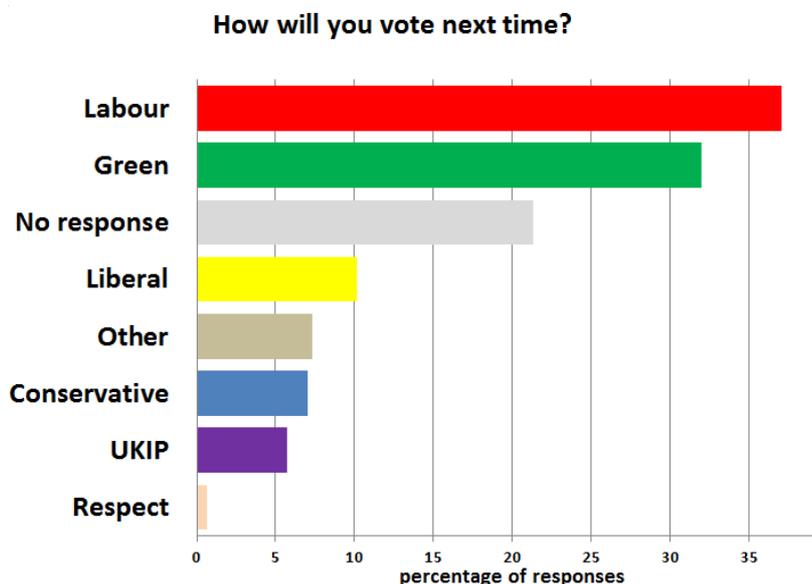


Fig 11. Voting patterns of respondents

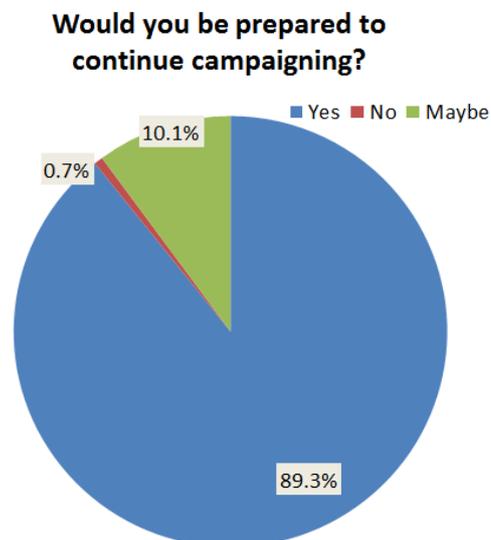


Fig 12. Willingness to continue campaign

2.4 Narrative responses

Some recurring themes observed in the responses submitted to the three free-text questions by 479 people.

Likes – 455 comments	Dislikes – 277 comments (93 of which said they had no critical	Suggestions – 278 comments
Visionary, realistic, achievable	Lengthy document, provide a summary	Link with children, education
Informative, interesting, exciting		Stronger emphasis on recreation & access, wildlife, urban trees
Well-thought out, well-researched, well-presented		Include UK context, link with global concerns

3. Conclusions

There was very strong support for the ideas expressed in the Vision produced by **Our Forests** from a large number of respondents, irrespective of whether they had read the Vision document or not. The key principles clearly strike a chord with a large number of people who are members of 38 Degrees. More of the respondents to this survey identify themselves as Labour-or Green party supporters currently, compared with supporters of the parties of the coalition Government (Conservative and Liberal), but there was no strong correlation between the strength of support for the Vision and party allegiance. Similarly, although the geographical spread of respondents was heavily weighted to southern England, the other regions of England, and even those of the other nations in the UK, did not produce clearly different responses.

A very large majority of those responding to the survey reported that they are prepared to continue campaigning for public forests if the Government's response to the Independent Panel on Forestry's recommendations on the future of English forests does not fit their ideas for protecting forests for future generations. The focus group members were also inclined to continue campaigning to prevent the public forests from being sold.

There was huge support for the notion of separating care of public forests from politics and for a continuing role for the Forestry Commission, which was thought to be managing the public forest estate well. This belief had also been expressed during the focus group.

A large majority of respondents indicated a willingness to pay more than the current rate of ca. 30p/yr. for public forests, most at rates exceeding £5.00 through taxes. There was some support for the idea that bodies other than the Government should pay for the public forest estate, but almost universal support for the Government to continue its financial support. The focus group were also extremely surprised at the relatively low level of tax money that is directed to supporting public forests. The expressed willingness to pay more in taxes to support forestry in England and Wales was somewhat unexpected, given the current economic climate.

A large majority of respondents believed that improved management of private woodland would improve benefits, particularly for local people and wildlife, but also, in slightly smaller number, for ameliorating the effects of climate change.

Although substantially fewer people responded to the free-text questions in the survey, nearly 40% did provide comments on the Vision document. There was a great deal of very positive support for, and few real criticisms of, the Vision document. A short summary would clearly be appreciated by some, but it was broadly praised for content and style. Amongst the suggestions for strengthening the Vision were adding more information about the importance to children, through education, of forest and woodland in Britain and globally. A number of respondents wanted an even stronger emphasis on recreational and health benefits of woodlands - from the largest forests in Britain to urban parks and street trees. In this context, the example of Birmingham's street trees was considered worthy of mention alongside London's well-known parks.

One interesting idea that emerged from several respondents and from the focus group was finding ways of involving local communities with the Forestry Commission in caring for the nation's public forest estate.

Another suggestion that emerged from the focus group and was expressed in a variety of ways by survey respondents was the importance of communicating the link between British forests and global concerns about forest loss and degradation.

Finally, an idea that emerged from more than one survey respondent, and which was discussed with a great deal of passion by several people in the focus group, was the strong sense of historical or emotional connection to the woods and forests of England: just knowing they were there in the landscape was hugely important for them.

Acknowledgements

Dr Gillian Petrokofsky of the University of Oxford, whose area of research includes stakeholder engagement in forestry, contributed to the design of the survey and analysed the results. She also co-facilitated the focus group.



Hannah Lownsbrough of 38 Degrees undertook the technical aspects of the survey, and was responsible for its attractive presentation on the website and for publicising it to members. Hannah also organised the focus group and made possible the smooth running of the session.

We acknowledge with deep gratitude the time spent by 38 Degrees' supporters on completing the survey and engaging with **Our Forests**.



The Independent Panel on Forestry first met on 31st March 2011. The same day, a group of individuals, all of whom had been actively challenging the Government's disposal proposals, also met and agreed the urgent need to form a separate 'ginger group' to ensure the Panel focused on key issues, considered crucial available evidence, and took onboard grassroots views.

Individual members of **Our Forests**, in alphabetical order, are: **Hen Anderson; Richard Daniels; Gabriel Hemery; Tony Juniper; Rod Leslie; Robin Maynard; Jonathon Porritt**

See also:

www.saveourwoods.co.uk/category/our-forests

www.gabrielhemery.com/our-forests

www.38degrees.org.uk