



Public ready to rise up again if Government fails them over public woods & forests

In a survey carried out by **Our Forests** with 38 Degrees, just under 90% of those responding said they would campaign against the Government if their concerns about and hopes for England's public woods and forests are not met.

Hen Anderson founder of Save Our Woods and **Our Forests** member said, *"This survey confirms what we know directly from our grassroots networks, in communities across the country people are gearing up again to challenge the Government and put pressure on their MPs if needs be."*

Our Forests has been in touch with many of those groups who share our concerns and who have signed up to the following public statement, which we will be putting to Government and sending out to all 171 MPs with public woods and forests within their constituencies:

"We believe that public ownership of the Public Forest Estate must be secured, through new legislation. The rich cultural, historical and natural diversity of our forests and woods, and full access to them, is best protected under the continued stewardship of the Forestry Commission, fully resourced to sustainably manage and expand our multi-purpose Public Forest Estate now and in the future."

The Independent Panel on Forestry is due to publish its report and recommendations to Government on the future of our public woods and forests (the Public Forest Estate), the Forestry Commission and England's woodland and forestry policy in general on Wednesday, 4th July

In its first policy U-turn, the Government was forced to declare that it would halt its disposal proposals on 17th February 2011, but England's public woods and forests are still not safe. The initial tranche of 40,000 hectares put up for 'disposal' has only been taken off the market *'pending'* the publication of the Independent Panel's report

Rich Daniels, **Our Forests** member and chair of Hands Off Our Forest said, *"It would seem political suicide to do so, but the evidence on record from Parliament is that the Government could put significant areas of public woods and forests back on the market. If they go against the public will on this issue, they can expect a conflagration in constituencies across England."*

It would be unwise for Government to think that the sale of any significant part of OUR public Forests and woods would pass without reigniting the flames of protest in the hearts of people and forest communities across England. The prospect of any our public woods and forests being threatened again after we have fought so hard to protect them will be met with even more determined campaigning."

Not surprisingly, given the still present threat of future sales, almost everyone

surveyed wanted to get the Secretary of State's hands off our public woods – under current law that political appointee is said to 'own' our woods and forests [8]. While people wanted an end to all short-termist political meddling in the management of our public woods and forests – they were strongly in favour of the Public Forest Estate remaining a publicly-owned and supported national resource.

Nearly 90% of respondents felt that the Public Forest Estate merited on-going taxpayer support – with over 65% of those prepared as taxpayers to contribute at least £5.00 annually with 32% willing to see taxpayer contributions of more than £10.00 per year. The current settlement for the management of all 1,500 of England's public woods and forests amounts to a subsidy from taxpayers in England of just 30p per person per year (70% of the costs of managing the 258,000 hectares of the Public Forest Estate are met by income generated from activities taking place and products generated from the Public Forest Estate).