

The National Forest Company



THE NATIONAL
FOREST

Heart of the Forest Masterplan Specification

January 2020

Summary

The National Forest Company (NFC) invites consultants to submit proposals to work with the NFC, local planning authorities (LPAs) and partners to produce a Masterplan for the Heart of the Forest. The Heart of the Forest is an area of around 10 square miles of former industrial landscape currently under restoration on the Leicestershire / Derbyshire border. The area has been subject to significant change over the previous 25 years from a working coalfield to an emerging visitor destination set within an establishing wooded landscape.

The Masterplan will look to build on these achievements and set out how the next 25 years could see the area become an established and sustainable visitor destination, serving both residents and visitors, set within maturing woodlands. The evolution of the area will be based on the emerging National Forest '[Greenprint](#)' themes of creating a low carbon and sustainable economy, forming an environment resilient to climate change and the creation of a National Forest sense of place.

The Masterplan will be produced in two phases. Phase one will be an inspiring and visual document which will engage and enthuse partners, landowners, businesses and local residents to collectively drive ambition and realise the potential of the area. Phase two will establish clear governance for delivery of the vision through the development and delivery of a more detailed plan. This commission is to deliver phase one and to make recommendations for a proposed approach to phase two.

Context

The National Forest

The National Forest covers 200 square miles of the Midlands. Since 1995, almost 9 million trees have been planted across hundreds of woodlands increasing Forest cover from c.6% to 21% of the area.

The creation of the National Forest is led by the National Forest Company (NFC) a non-profit institution within the public sector sponsored by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The NFC is also a registered charity.

The last 25 years has seen the NFC lead the transformation of the area through the creation of new woodlands as a catalyst for change. The NFC is currently working on a new vision for the next 25 years which will focus on the mitigation and adaptation to climate change; creating a place for a greener future, and demonstrating how a woodland environment can be the catalyst for sustainable living.

In 2017 the NFC produced a Tourism Growth Plan to support its ambition to develop the National Forest as a sustainable tourism destination. This sets out a 10-year plan for how the NFC will realise the potential of the Forest as a visitor destination and move from an emerging destination to a recognised destination.

The Heart of the Forest

The Heart of the Forest covers around 10 square miles and is a microcosm of the Forest as a whole (see plan at Annex A). The area was historically worked for coal and clay leaving a landscape and economy in need of restoration and regeneration. Over the last 25 years, through the creation of the National Forest, the area has been rejuvenated and now accommodates visitor attractions, tourist accommodation and a network of paths and cycleways set within an emerging forested landscape.

These visitor attractions include Conkers Discovery Centre, Hicks Lodge Cycle Centre, Moira Furnace and the re-watered Ashby Canal while accommodation is provided by the National Forest Youth Hostel and the Camping and Caravan Club.

Bordering the Heart of the Forest are three large settlements Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Swadlincote and Measham, connectivity to these centres for visitor, enterprise and employment purposes is important, as is the role the Heart of the Forest plays as a visitor hub for the wider National Forest area.

The restoration of the area is not yet complete however. The final restoration of the New Albion landfill should be completed late 2020 which will add an extra 50ha of accessible new woodland and other habitats to the area. Further former mineral land is also currently under restoration for completion by 2022.

A high proportion of land within the Heart of the Forest is in public or charity ownership. Key landowners are the NFC, the National Forest Charitable Trust, Forestry England, the Woodland Trust, North West Leicestershire District Council and Leicestershire County Council.

The Heart of the Forest is defined in the North West Leicestershire Local Plan as *‘where there will be a concentration of tourism and leisure activities associated with the National Forest, and opportunities based on the woodland and environmental economy’*.

The restoration of land, the high proportion of sites in public ownership and the supportive planning policy provide an opportunity to bring forward development which can not only add to the attractions and accommodation already in the Heart of the Forest, but do so in a manner that reflects the NFC’s aspirations for sustainable tourism and elevates the currently disparate attractions into one coherent destination.

The NFC is looking to create an innovative masterplan that will be endorsed by partners to drive a common approach to development across the Heart of the Forest. The Masterplan will engage, inspire and enthuse partners, landowners and the local community to rethink the potential of the area and to play their part in bringing about the vision.

Outcomes

The final masterplan is expected to deliver the following outcomes:

- A collective ambition for the future of the Heart of the Forest.
- An enhanced visitor experience across the Heart of the Forest.
- Complimentary offers between attractions and accommodation providers.
- Accelerated forecasts for visitor numbers, overnight stays, spend and jobs.
- Clarity and reassurance for planning officers and potential funders.
- Greater ROI for public and private investors in the area.
- Efficiencies through aligned or pooled resourcing for land management, skills, marketing etc.
- Renewed governance and leadership to support further grant applications.

Approach

The Heart of the Forest Masterplan will demonstrate how a coherent visitor destination set within interconnected woodlands and working across multiple landownerships can be achieved.

The Masterplan will be delivered in two parts:

1. A high level **Vision Document**; and
2. A **Detailed Plan**

This brief looks to appoint consultants to undertake work on Part 1 only though one of the outputs will be to provide recommendations on how Part 2 could be best taken forward.

Phase one objectives

The appointed consultants will be expected to familiarise themselves with the area, previous studies and other background evidence. Relevant background information and previous studies will be provided by the NFC but further research will need to be undertaken by the consultant team.

An **agreed vision** for the Heart of the Forest will be produced. This will incorporate the potential for change from the current restored industrial landscape to an established visitor destination with a clear identity which also attracts and encourages visitors to explore the wider National Forest area. The sense of place will be based on the journey that the landscape has undertaken including the historic industrial uses, the reforestation process and the creation of a coherent sustainable destination.

The Vision Document will identify **options for strategic investment** and set out **indicative development opportunities** which will maximise the potential of the area as a whole. During the Detailed Plan phase of this project, these will be explored further with more detailed feasibility studies, investment / project plans and management options developed.

Key connectivity opportunities will be central to the plan creating **new or improved non-vehicular routes** between attractions, identified potential future sites and the surrounding urban areas, including enhancement of routes for leisure and recreational use. Feasibility work to re-open the disused Ivanhoe line (a freight railway line with the potential to create a passenger route between Burton-upon-Trent and Leicester) is ongoing, potential options for a train station located in the Heart of the Forest should therefore be considered.

The Vision Document will set out how a sense of place can be established within the landscape to **create a character recognisable to this part of the Forest**. This may be through building materials and design, signage and interpretation, habitat creation or through other mechanisms which help create and reinforce the feeling and appearance of a coherent single destination.

The consultants will be required to engage with, and take direction from, a Project Steering Group which will be established to feed into the development of the Vision Document. Further details are set out below under Governance.

The consultant will be expected to advise on, and implement, an engagement process with local landowners, businesses, communities and other partners which are not represented directly on the Project Steering Group. Engagement will need to take place with these groups both during the formulation of the Vision Document and upon its publication.

Governance

The project lead is Louise Driver, Director of Operations, National Forest Company supported by Philip Metcalfe, Green Infrastructure and Planning Officer who will undertake operational management of the project.

The project will be overseen by a Project Board comprising of CEOs / Directors who will meet at the beginning and towards the end of the project. A Project Steering Group will meet every two months through the life of the project and have oversight of the developing Vision Document and will agree the final content before publication.

Representatives from the following organisations will be invited to attend the Board and Steering Group: NFC, National Forest Charitable Trust, North West Leicestershire District Council, South Derbyshire District Council, Leicestershire County Council and the Forestry Commission.

The final document will also be presented to and agreed by the NFC Board of Trustees prior to publication.

Deliverables

The appointed consultant will be expected to produce:

- A concise and visually-inspiring document to be used by the NFC, LPAs and other key partners to raise awareness, generate enthusiasm, gain commitment and begin to realise the potential of the Heart of the Forest. (100 printed documents and .pdf version). To include visuals which can be adapted for other use (powerpoint etc.).
- Digital version of the above either via webpages, Esri Story Map or similar.
- On completion of the first phase, recommendations on governance and approach to best take forward the Detailed Plan to deliver the vision.

Existing evidence

The NFC will provide copies of relevant background materials and previous studies including:

- Previous masterplans and strategies for the Heart of the Forest area including:
 - [Vision and Action Plan for the HoTF – Roger Tym & Partners](#) (2009)
 - HoTF Masterplan – Cullinan Studio (2006)
- Hanging Hill Farm Feasibility Study
- [NFC Tourism Growth Plan](#)
- Surveys and Reports from [Black to Green](#) (a Heritage Lottery Fund project in the Heart of the Forest).
- Emerging documents relating to the NFC's new [25 year vision](#).

Tender response and fee proposal

Tenders will set out:

- Clearly and concisely their proposed methodology for the project
- Relevant skills and experience, including examples of comparable work

- Details of each member of staff including experience, day rates and proposed hours to be worked on this project
- A clear project timeline with milestones and reporting arrangements
- The fee proposal with VAT, expenses and disbursements itemised separately.

Contact details for references should be provided.

Tenders will also need to include details on their organisational practices to reduce carbon emissions and help address the impacts of climate change.

Tender evaluation criteria and scoring

Tenders will be scored against the following criteria:

	<u>weighting</u>
Experience of consultants	30%
Methodology proposed	30%
Value for money	20%
Quality of comparable work	10%
Ability to deliver to time	10%

Indicative timescales

The NFC is looking to appoint a consultant to begin work in February 2020, initial proposals will be presented in May 2020 with a final document completed by July 2020 and published in September 2020.

Tender submission

Responses should be submitted to Angela Beech, Director of Corporate Services, NFC, by 5pm on the 3rd February 2020 (abeech@nationalforest.org). Please mark your email **‘Tender in Confidence – Ref: Heart of the Forest Masterplan.**

This contract will be awarded on the NFC’s Standard Terms and Conditions (attached).

The NFC is not liable for any costs associated with preparing your tender proposal.

Interviews with shortlisted consultants are anticipated to take place on the 14th February.

Please register your interest and make any requests for further information, or clarification on this tender document, by email to Philip Metcalfe (details below) by no later than Friday 24th January.
This will enable us to respond to all interested parties.

Philip Metcalfe
Green Infrastructure & Planning Officer
The National Forest Company, Bath Yard, Moira, Swadlincote DE12 6BA.
01283 554209
pmetcalfe@nationalforest.org

Annex A – Plan of the Heart of the Forest