

The Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

31st January 2011

We are writing to present the arguments for designating Thetford Forest as a Heritage Forest as classified by the Consultation on the Public Forest Estate.

Thetford Forest is a highly diverse natural habitat for birds and wildlife. Over 94% of the forest is classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – this makes up 15% of all SSSI woodland in England. The same 94% of the forest is also classified as a Special Protection Area for birds making up just under 50% of all SPA woodland in England. It is one of the few English summer nesting grounds of the Skylark and one of only two English summer nesting grounds for Stone Curlews. According to Natural England parts of the forest are also classified as Special Area of Conservation for sensitive species including several types of rare bat. It is also home to the historic Lynford Arboretum – an area of cultivation and exhibition of rare trees.

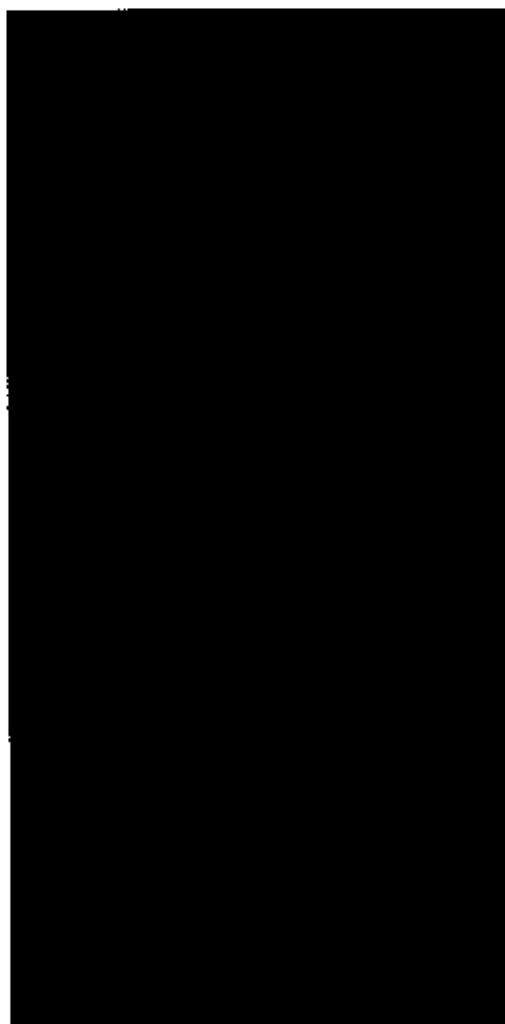
The forest also plays an important role as a community asset. It draws nearly 1.5 million people annually from all corners of the country, not only for its status as a natural habitat, but also for the many historic and cultural attractions that it contains. Its historic attractions include Grimes Graves, one of only ten bronze-age flint mines identified in England. The site – now maintained by English Heritage – is one of the earliest mining sites in Britain dating from 3000-2000BC; the same era as Stonehenge. The forest is also home to the Desert Rats Memorial, one of the most iconic and memorable British units to serve during World War II. The remains of the camp – where the Desert Rats spent their only time on British soil between the North African desert and Normandy's Gold Beach – have been immaculately preserved and are visited every week by hundreds of visitors including many school history classes.

People also come to Thetford Forest to enjoy outdoor pursuits such as cross-country biking, horse riding, rambling and even paintballing. According to the Duke of Edinburgh Award

scheme it is the prime location in the East of England for camping and orienteering making it the ideal place for local young people to gain confidence and develop team-building skills. It is also on occasion used as a venue for music concerts whose variety of performing artist are enjoyed by all age groups.

Thetford Forest is a valuable part of our heritage. Its unique and varied natural habitat is a vital asset for Norfolk and Suffolk's community. We support the notion that Thetford Forest might be owned more locally and we recognise and value the safeguards put in place for access and biodiversity but nevertheless we believe Thetford Forest deserves the extra protections offered by Heritage Status.

→ Elizabeth Truss MP





Elizabeth Truss MP

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Dear [REDACTED]

I would like to make sure that you have received the attached letter sent last week by me and a number of my colleagues to Caroline putting the case for Thetford Forest to be granted Heritage Forest status. If not I would be grateful if you could bring it to her attention.

Best wishes,

Elizabeth Truss MP

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