

Newborough forest plans explained to the public

People living in and around Newborough forest have been informed of essential work which must be carried out to ensure the forest meets stringent European environmental regulations.

Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) and the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) met representatives from the Newborough Forest Liaison Partnership at the Technium Centre in Bangor on Thursday (April 30) to explain the action that is required in order for the management of the forest to comply with the European Habitats Directive.

Failure to carry out the work could result in severe penalties being imposed on the Welsh Assembly Government, which owns the land.

The Liaison Partnership has helped FCW to develop a Forest Design Plan but it could not be approved because the plan did not enable enough of the sand dune habitat to come into favourable ecological condition - a key requirement of the Habitats Directive.

Newborough forest is a large pine forest on Anglesey that lies between Newborough village and the popular beach by Llanddwyn Island. It forms part of Newborough Warren/Ynys Llanddwyn, which was designated in the early 2000s as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) - the most important conservation designation in Europe.

The sand dunes and the wet areas between the dunes, called slacks, were identified as key features of the SAC. In their natural state, these sand dunes would shift about in response to winds and tides.

However, the mobile dunes, in particular, have become fixed in places by tree planting carried out long before the site was designated as a SAC. These trees tend to bind the sand and prevent it from moving about along the coast, preventing more natural processes which are important to the SAC features.

CCW have prepared a management plan setting out objectives for the whole SAC. This was published in November 2008. Unfortunately, the Forest Design Plan is not consistent with the management plan for the whole SAC as it does not enable enough of the sand dune habitat to come into favourable ecological condition.

FCW Director Trefor Owen, who attended the meeting along with CCW Chief Executive Roger Thomas, said, "Due to the sensitivities of this site, we have been working for several years with stakeholders to develop a Forest Design Plan for Newborough Forest. "However, we have been advised by the Assembly Government and CCW that unless we

demonstrate that action is being taken to improve the condition of the sand dunes, there is a risk that the EU may impose penalties on the government.

"As a manager for public land, FC Wales is responsible for ensuring that the management of the Assembly's woodland estate complies with the relevant legal requirements."

Work on bringing the forest into line with the Habitats Regulations will begin in the coming months when a strip of trees on the western edge of the forest, identified in the draft Forest Design Plan, is felled.

Members of the NFLP were also told a management plan would be prepared for the forest, setting out how it will be managed to bring the sand dunes into favourable ecological condition. This management plan will also enable FCW to amend the Forest Design Plan.

Mr Owen said, "We recognise the high value that the forest has for local people. Many of those attending the meeting raised concerns about the changes and asked for more clarification as to what management is required.

"Positive progress has been made in many areas thanks to the close working relationship we have built up with the group - such as the establishment of new footpaths, a redesigned car park at Malltraeth and the setting up of a volunteer group, to name but a few - and we are happy to agree to their request to have an opportunity to see and comment on the management plan before it is submitted for approval."

Mr Owen said FCW had a good track record of engagement with the community in Newborough and would strive to maintain a positive working relationship by ensuring the community was kept fully informed of progress with the work.

A newsletter would be produced to help people contact FCW if they wanted updates, and relevant documents would be placed on the FCW website so that developments could be tracked

Mr Owen added, "We are aware of the importance of the forest for tourism in the area and wildlife and we believe that, once the immediate and any subsequent felling has been completed, we will be left with an area every bit as beautiful and enticing as it has been."

NOTES TO EDITORS

Forestry Commission Wales is the government department responsible for forestry policy and looks after the 320,000 acres (130,000 ha) of public forests owned by the Welsh Assembly Government.

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