

**Email received by Mr Stephen O'Brien (MP for Eddisbury) on 18 February 2011  
regarding the Government's proposed sale or lease of Forestry Commission land**

In the light of your earlier communications regarding the consultation on the Public Forestry Estate and the Public Bodies Bill Forestry Clauses, I wanted to take the earliest opportunity to update you on the latest significant developments.

The government has listened to the feedback on this important issue, and we are acting on that feedback by doing three things, which I hope and am confident you will welcome. These measures are:

Removing the clauses from the Public Bodies Bill which would permit publicly owned forests to be transferred into different ownership.

Closing the consultation on the Future of the Public Forestry Estate.

Setting up a panel of independent experts to consider how we can better protect our woodlands for the future as part of broader forestry policy.

The reason we have done this is because, as I have stated consistently as an individual MP and as we have stated collectively as the Government, we believe it is vitally important we secure better access protection and better wildlife habitats in the future. We have all seen or read about the legacy of forest sales which took place under the previous government with inadequate protections which led to reduced access to our woodland, and we are determined not to let that happen again. However, that important discussion has been drowned out by the considerable public anxiety over access rights and sadly at times the exploitation of people's unfounded fears by our political opponents.

I very much hope that now we have listened to the responses of many people, removed the relevant powers from the Public Bodies Bill and given our clear assurances over the questions of access and ownership, we can get on to the important discussion about how to improve the quality and quantity of our woodlands. To that end we have asked a panel of independent experts to consider how best we can meet the challenges of improving access to woodlands, improving the wildlife habitat offered by our woodlands and safeguarding our woodlands for future years.

As I know you will be aware, I have campaigned vigorously for the most rigorous protection measures to be applied to Delamere Forest so that we can all continue to enjoy the benefits it provides. I believe that now we have acted decisively on the public feedback, we can make real headway in securing a better future for forests like Delamere. Please do get in touch again if you have any suggestions you would like me to convey.

In the meantime, let me thank you again for taking the time and trouble to ensure I have been aware of your concerns and anxieties and for demonstrating your commitment to the best traditions of our democratic, consultative form of politics. I am pleased this Coalition Government has listened – something notably lacking in the previous Labour Government – and that you and all those with similar views and concerns will give due credit for that responsiveness.

I am glad that I was able to play my part, on your behalf, as your elected representative, in bringing influence towards this decision.

Yours sincerely,  
Stephen O'Brien