



## Nature v Nurture Protecting and Managing Ashdown Forest

### Purpose

This Debate Pack is designed to inform and promote discussion with Key Stage 2 children prior to, and during, your visit to Ashdown Forest.

It looks at the key management issue of **cutting down trees**, aiming to promote awareness of Ashdown Forest itself and an understanding of why such action is needed.

Through activities, thoughts and discussion, children will consider different opinions and begin to make informed decisions about a relevant and often misinterpreted local issue.

### Curriculum Links

**National Curriculum: English: En1 2e, 3acd, Geography: 1ad, 2d, 3ce, 5ab, 6a**

The activities listed embrace the Every Child Matters agenda, make links to Key Aspects of Learning<sup>1</sup> and are matched to National Curriculum level descriptors in Geography<sup>2</sup>. By no means are these links exhaustive. Further support in using these materials and developing ideas in the classroom is available from the Education Officer at the High Weald AONB Unit. Email [info@highweald.org](mailto:info@highweald.org) quoting 'Education Query' in title.

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<sup>1</sup> Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching in the Primary years. *Primary National Strategy 2004*

<sup>2</sup> As outlined in *Planning a Skills Based Curriculum*, Chris Quigley 2008



## Nature v Nurture Pack Content

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*NB: Activity Sheet 2 is available as a separate download.*



## Nature v Nurture Background for Teachers

### Ashdown Forest: Key facts

- In Norman times, Ashdown was established as a deer hunting forest.
- Ashdown has always been common land, allowing commoners the right to graze animals on the land.
- The word “forest” is derived from the Latin "foris", meaning “outside” and in medieval England came to mean land outside common law and belonging to the Crown.
- Ashdown Forest looks different to its immediate surroundings because of its distinctive land-use over the last nine centuries. The Forest hasn’t been farmed but has been heavily exploited for grazing, military training, deer hunting and for its extensive wood, bracken, stone and iron resources.
- Ashdown Forest has national and international importance as it a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), an SPA (Special Protection Area) and is part of the European Natura 2000 Network as it hosts some of Europe's most threatened species and habitats.
- The two main ecological habitats that make up Ashdown Forest are heathland and woodland, each of which provides a very different environment for animals to live in.
- Ashdown Forest is the largest area of lowland heath in the South-East, covering approximately 2,396 hectares (10 square miles).
- Ashdown Forest is at the heart of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – one of the England’s 60 Finest Landscapes.
- Nearly two thirds of its 6,500 acres (2,500 hectares) are heathland, amounting to 2.5% of the UK's extent of this rare habitat.
- Despite its name, woodland makes up less than 40% of the total area of Ashdown Forest.

## Nature v Nurture Background for Teachers

### So what's the issue?

Heathland, the main habitat of Ashdown Forest, has been created over many centuries by the impact of people and their livestock. Commoners living on or near the Forest had – and still have – rights to graze livestock, collect firewood and cut bracken and heather for animal bedding. Commoner activities stopped the spread of trees and created the Forest's distinctive open heathland landscape. Today, of the 730 existing Commoners, only a very few take advantage of their grazing and wood-cutting rights. As a result, trees are spreading and heathland is declining. Pre World War II, 5% of Ashdown Forest was wooded; it is now 40%.

*NB: Whilst this pack focuses on tree clearance, grazing is an additional management strategy that is of growing importance on the Forest. Commoner's livestock are being used to graze 550 hectares of heathland to help combat the spread of trees. Grazing helps to maintain the heath and reduces the number of trees that can begin to grow. There are specific management issues linked to this – if you would like to know more please contact the Ashdown Forest Centre or look at information on [www.ashdownforest.org](http://www.ashdownforest.org)*

### Nature v Nurture

Most would agree that Ashdown's heathland is a valuable landscape and worthy of careful protection – especially as so much of England's heathland has disappeared. However, it is crucial to note that **this heathland largely originated through - and is maintained by - centuries of human activity (tree clearance, grazing and fire)**. If that activity should cease then the heathland would disappear and natural succession (trees germinating and growing up over the heath) would take place. In the same way that if a garden lawn is not tended to it soon becomes overgrown and invaded by other species.

To maintain the heath on Ashdown Forest, a bit of nurturing is needed. The invading scrub and trees are carefully managed, e.g. cleared or burnt. However, this often causes great misunderstanding about what is going on. A popular view is that trees should never be destroyed...but what about the survival of the heathland?

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), of which Ashdown Forest is a part, is home to a multitude of trees. Trees and woodland cover over 1/3 of the AONB's 1,457 square kilometers (570 square miles). In stark contrast only a very small proportion of the High Weald is heath – which is an even smaller part of the UK's total heathland.



## Nature v Nurture Background for Teachers

In much of England, heathland landscapes have disappeared. Ashdown Forest has the largest and best-preserved area of this habitat in the South East but it takes careful management, which *includes the cutting down of trees*, to keep it that way.

### Should we cut down trees?

Tree clearance is a contentious issue. A 2007 study carried out by the Forestry Commission revealed that 25% of people surveyed thought that trees should not be felled in any circumstances and 62% said that cutting down trees makes climate change worse. For many, our knowledge of tree felling relates to mass deforestation in places such as the Amazon Rainforest, where huge areas (the equivalent of 6 football pitches a minute<sup>3</sup>) are disappearing. Trees are cleared and never replaced with the original vegetation. We are also surrounded with climate change messages and know that cutting down trees increases the amount of carbon dioxide released into the air. This, in turn, contributes to global warming.

**However, cutting down trees is not always bad for the environment.** “As long as woodlands are managed in a sustainable way, there can be a multitude of benefits for the climate, for people and for wildlife”<sup>4</sup>. It is also important to note that the trees cleared on Ashdown Forest are always responsibly used for fuel and that natural re-growth of trees is a rapid process. The recent lack of grazing and cutting has allowed much of the former heath to become woodland. If nature continues to take its course the heathland will disappear entirely.

### Why save the heath?

On heathland you can find:

- 5000 types of invertebrate, including the rare silver studded blue butterfly.
- 27 out of all 39 British dragonflies, 8 of which are totally dependent on this habitat.
- More than 500 species of spider, all of which are carnivorous!
- All British reptiles and amphibians.
- Endangered birds such as Nightjar, Woodlark and Dartford Warbler.
- Uncommon plants such as Marsh Gentian, Bog Asphodel and the carnivorous Sundew.

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<sup>3</sup> Greenpeace 2005

<sup>4</sup> Climate change and Trees Information Pack, Forestry Commission



## Nature v Nurture Background for Teachers

- A recent visitor study carried out by Ashdown Forest found that the physical environment, i.e. the heathland, scenery and openness, is influential in 71% of peoples' decisions to visit the Forest. People visit Ashdown Forest because of its 'open' beauty and views to the surrounding area. The heath is important for people, not just for wildlife.
- The heath is rich in cultural heritage. On Ashdown Forest there are Roman roads, bloomeries of the iron industry, military trenches from World War II and it is the home of Winnie-the-Pooh!

### For or against – a summary

Tree Clearance at Ashdown Forest	
<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>
Clearing the trees allows heathland to survive. Heathland is home to many types of wildlife and birds, including some rare species.	We shouldn't interfere, let natural succession take place.
The heathland has originated over centuries of human involvement – why should that stop now?	People like trees. They are appealing and valued by many.
Cutting down trees provides fuel for local consumers.	Cutting down trees can contribute to climate change (see 'Should we cut down trees?' paragraph for further explanation)
Humans use the Forest extensively – partly because it is a heathland which provides valued views, scenery and open land for recreation.	
The heathland has an intrinsic beauty. From purple heather in the summer to yellow gorse in the spring – its beauty is valued by many.	



## Nature v Nurture Background for Teachers

### Conclusion

To protect the heathland on Ashdown Forest, some trees are systematically removed. Trees such as birch, oak and pine quickly seed and grow, leading to woods spreading out and the heath to die. Therefore, it is necessary to cut back the trees to allow the heath to flourish.

Conservation work aims to retain all appropriate habitats and the full spectrum of flora and fauna. By no means are *all* the trees in the Forest cut down. Approx. 40% of Ashdown Forest is woodland and some trees are also left on the heath to provide bird song posts (and nightjars nest on the short vegetation below trees). Trees may also be left for landscape aesthetics and for animal shelter. Woods are still valued on Ashdown Forest but if the entire area were allowed to evolve into woodland the valuable heathland would disappear.

“The presence of heathland is the result of a historic process of traditional human interactions with the landscape and **any** loss, damage or deterioration of the heathland is, therefore, changing the identity of the Forest and the High Weald AONB” (Jason Lavender, Co-Director, High Weald AONB).

**The importance of heathland for wildlife means that its management and conservation are a top priority. Woodland clearance takes place in order that the heathland habitat survives.**

It is an ongoing balance, a complex issue and a challenge for all who use and visit Ashdown Forest.

The production of this resource has been supported by:



The Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme is involving people with the unique heritage in one of England's Finest Landscapes. [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)

## Nature v Nurture Lesson Plan

Please note it is assumed that the children have been briefed about their trip to Ashdown Forest before starting these activities.

Setting the Scene for Ashdown Forest		Yr Group: Upper KS2	Date:
National Curriculum Programme of Study: <b>English: En1 2e, 3acd, Geography: 1ad, 2d,3e, 5ab, 6a.</b>			
Key Aspects of Learning: Enquiry, Reasoning, Empathy, Communication.			
Lesson Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For children to be introduced to and learn some key information about Ashdown Forest.</li> <li>For children to understand that part of looking after the heathland involves cutting down trees and the reasons for this type of management.</li> </ul>			
Duration (approx)	Activity		Notes
10 mins	<b>Introduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>What do you think about?</i> Provide <b>Activity sheet 1</b> for children to note down or discuss existing thoughts about forest-related topics. Encourage them to write the first thing that comes into their head. Share ideas as a class, children to look back at this sheet after their visit.</li> </ul>		<b>Support</b> Children could draw as well as write ideas on activity sheet.
15 mins	<b>Main Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Where is Ashdown Forest?</i> <b>Activity Sheet 2.</b> Use and complete map sheet to understand the Forest's location.</li> </ul>		<i>Activity Sheet 2 is a pdf, available as a separate download.</i>
10 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using <i>True or False?</i> <b>Activity Sheet 3</b> and cards, play True/False guessing game with class. Help them to understand some unique characteristics of the Forest. Would children agree that this was a valuable landscape and worth protecting?</li> </ul>		
20 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use <i>Start the Debate</i> <b>Activity Sheet 4</b> sheet prior to any discussion or research. Get the children to say whether they agree or disagree with the statement 'Trees should not be cut down', jotting down reasons for both. Use these ideas as a basis for class discussion and debate. Encourage the children to justify their opinions and to take on board other points of view. <b>Support</b> some children may need extra support to join in with discussion, perhaps working with an adult or in a smaller group.</li> </ul>		<i>Activity could be done in groups each with a copy of the sheet or as a whole class, contributing to copy on whiteboard.</i>
10 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Display the <b>Photo for discussion</b> – do children know what is happening here? (Photo depicts tree clearance on Ashdown Forest, in order to preserve heathland) Reveal that the photo was taken at Ashdown Forest – do the children find that surprising? Why? Why not? Is it a good or bad thing that the trees are being cleared?</li> </ul>		
10 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain that Ashdown Forest has been created by centuries of grazing, woodland clearance and other forms of human management – if trees were not cut down the heathland would not exist. It's heath v tree – what would you do?</li> </ul>		
			<b>Extension:</b> Whilst tree clearance means that heath can survive, would everyone be happy about this? Who might disagree with the trees being cut down?





10 mins	<b>Plenary</b> What do you want to know? Individuals/pairs etc write a list of questions that they would like to ask during visit to Ashdown Forest. Take the list with you when you go and aim to have them all answered!	
	<b>Resources</b> Activity Sheets 1, 2, 3 & 4, Photo for discussion, true and false cards.	
<b><u>Follow Up Activity</u></b>  After your visit to the Forest it would be valuable to discuss what has been found out and to refer back to Activity Sheet 1, 'What do you think about?' Children can amend their ideas if necessary and add extra content where they can – perhaps in a different colour for self assessment purposes.		

### National Curriculum level descriptors in Geography

Progression of Skills\*:

#### Level 2

- I ask what is this place like? What and who will I see in this place?
- I tell others the things I like and dislike about a place and give clear reasons.
- I describe places using geography words such as natural and built.
- I look at places and draw features I like or dislike, sorting them into groups.
- I can say where somewhere is using words such as the city or town name, and the region.

#### Level 3

- I ask, "Which physical and human features does this place have?"
- I describe different points of view on an environmental issue affecting a locality.
- I find out about places and their features.
- I look at maps of areas I am studying and identify features.
- I can summarise an environmental issue either in the local area or an area I am studying.

#### Level 4

- I ask, "Which PHYSICAL and HUMAN features does this place have?"
- I ask, "What may this place be like in the future?"
- I describe different points of view on an environmental issue affecting a locality and give my opinion on the issue, giving reasons.
- I find out about places and the features in those places by either going to that place to observe or by deciding which will be the best sources of information to look at.
- I can summarise an environmental issue, its possible causes, and solutions either in the local area or an area I am studying.
- I can summarise ways that people are trying to manage an environment.

\* *Planning a Skills Based Curriculum, Quigley 2008*



## Nature v Nurture Activities during your visit

### Suggestions for activities during your visit to Ashdown Forest

All school visits to the Ashdown Forest Centre need to be booked in advance. Details and a booking form can be found on [www.ashdownforest.org](http://www.ashdownforest.org)

Guided and self-guided options are available. If doing a self-guided visit you may find some of the suggestions below useful:

- Visit a coppiced site of Sweet Chestnut trees – contact Ashdown Forest Centre for information about a site approx. 1600 metres (1 mile) from the Visitor Centre.
- Heathland identification, use Heathlands in the Weald leaflet to look at this amazing habitat in more detail. Copies of this leaflet are kept in the Education Barn at the Ashdown Forest Centre or can be downloaded from the Publications Library at [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)
- Minibeast safari in different habitats – one in woods, one on heath for comparison – equipment for safari can be pre-booked from the Ashdown Forest Centre (see below)
- High Weald Hero activity cards – downloadable from [www.ashdownforest.org](http://www.ashdownforest.org) or [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)

Field work equipment e.g. sweep nets, art materials and minibeast magnifying pots can be pre-booked for your use (no hire charges apply!). Let us know when you would like to visit and then download the list of available equipment from [www.ashdownforest.org](http://www.ashdownforest.org). Fill in what you would like to use, send it back and the equipment will be ready on the day, pre-packed in a convenient rucksack.



## Nature v Nurture What do you think about...? Activity Sheet 1

Use this sheet to record your thoughts and ideas about the following topics. They are all linked to your trip to Ashdown Forest. Write or draw the first things you think of – if you don't know what some of them are, make sure you find out during your visit!

**Ashdown Forest:**

**Heathland:**

**Trees:**

**Conservation:**

**Coppicing:**

**Cutting down a tree:**

**Grazing:**

**How do humans use forests?**

After your visit, look back at this sheet to see if any of your thoughts have changed or can be added to.

## Nature v Nurture True or False Activity Sheet 3

Provide children with cards marked True/False.

Children can raise the appropriate card as a statement is read out. Were they correct? What surprises them?

Statements for teacher to read:

- “Some forests have no trees.”  
**TRUE** - e.g. deer forests in Scotland; Ashdown Forest in the last century.
- “On heathland you can find 1,000 types of invertebrate.”  
**FALSE** - you can find 5,000!
- “Cutting a tree down can keep it alive for centuries.”  
**TRUE** e.g. the coppicing technique encourages re-growth.
- “Ashdown Forest is home to a carnivorous plant called the sundew.”  
**TRUE** - In folklore, the sundew had a reputation for preserving long life.
- “1 species of deer can be found on the Forest.”  
**FALSE** - 4 species. Roe, Muntjac, Fallow (most common) and Sika Deer all live on the Forest.
- “Forests were originally used for hunting.”  
**TRUE** - forests were deer hunting grounds often owned by nobility.
- “Ashdown Forest is home to Winnie-the-Pooh.”  
**TRUE** - many of the places mentioned in A.A. Milne’s books are on the Forest - including the Enchanted Place, Kanga and Roo’s Sandy Pit and Eeyore’s Gloomy Place. A.A. Milne (the author) lived in Hartfield, a village close to the Forest.
- “Ashdown Forest was very important for the production of iron in Roman and Tudor times.”  
**TRUE** - in fact, iron ore was extracted from the Forest since before Roman times where it was processed in bloomeries. In 1496, Britain’s second blast furnace was built at Newbridge (on the Forest) which was a huge technological advance and allowed even greater production of iron.
- “Parts of the Ashdown Forest are used for farming.”  
**FALSE** - The Forest hasn’t been farmed but has been heavily exploited for grazing, military training and for its extensive wood, bracken, stone and iron resources.
- “Spiders cannot survive in heathland.”  
**FALSE** - Heathland is the best habitat for spiders; more than 500 species can be found among heath, all of which are carnivorous!



### True/False Cards for Activity Sheet 3

TRUE	FALSE
TRUE	FALSE
TRUE	FALSE
TRUE	FALSE
TRUE	FALSE
TRUE	FALSE
TRUE	FALSE



**Nature v Nurture  
Start the Debate  
Activity Sheet 4**

“Trees should not be cut down”

Agree	Disagree

## Nature v Nurture Photo for discussion

