



THE NATIONAL
FOREST

Invitation to Tender

Feasibility for a Forest Enterprise Hub

Tender reference: FEH/102025.

Date: 22/09/2025



Introduction

Under our governance and procurement practices The National Forest Company (NFC) is inviting applications from selected organisations to undertake a feasibility study and develop an outline business case for a new Forest Enterprise Hub in the Heart of the National Forest.

These instructions and conditions are designed to ensure that all organisations are given equal and fair consideration. It is important that you provide all the information that has been asked for and, in the format, and order specified. Pre- and post-tender negotiations are not permitted.

Nothing contained outside this document shall be taken as constituting a contract, agreement or representation between or on behalf of NFC and any other party as to how we will run the procurement.

NFC is not committed to any course of action as a result of issuing any invitation to participate in the procurement, any invitation to submit a proposal, negotiating with you in respect of the procurement or any other communication between NFC (whether directly or by its agents or representatives) and any other party. In particular, you should note that we:

- may exclude you if you do not conform with any of these instructions or conditions of procurement
- may choose not to accept any tenders or proposals at our absolute discretion
- do not commit to accepting the lowest price or any best and final offer.



Background

The National Forest

The National Forest covers 200 square miles of the counties of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire. Its creation began in the early 1990s, a radical vision to bring the benefits of trees, woodland and multi-use forestry to lowland England, where thousands of people live and work.

The Forest provides a national demonstration of the value of the natural environment to drive regeneration and showcase policy and practice, research and development in the heart of the country.

It was the first broadleaf forest to be created at scale in England for more than 900 years and is now seen as one of the boldest environmentally led regeneration initiatives in the country. It has transformed a post-industrial Midlands landscape – scarred by coal mining and heavy industry - from black to green.

Year by year, the National Forest has been steadily turning what was once one of the least wooded areas of England into a multi-purpose, sustainable forest. More than 9.8 million trees have been planted so far. Forest cover has increased from six percent to 25 percent, approaching double the national average for woodland cover. The aim is to reach around a third forest cover.

Trees have been the catalyst for change and transformation. The National Forest is a positive response to the climate crisis and is putting in place the building blocks to deliver mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Through partnerships the National Forest is working to create wildlife habitats, reduce flooding, improve air quality, store carbon and create space for outdoor education, supporting the health and wellbeing of communities and enabling Forest-related businesses to thrive.

The NFC leads the creation of the National Forest, working in partnership with landowners, local authorities, businesses and its communities. It has strong support from government, politicians and the public, and continues to be supported by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

More recently, the NFC's regional and national role has developed, and it is now the lead partner working on behalf of Defra to create three new National Forests during this parliament, the first was announced in April 2025 as the Western Forest. In addition, the NFC is a lead partner on the development of the Midlands Forest Network which aims to connect forested landscapes in the Midlands through new planting on targeted corridors providing natural capital and greater resilience, along with extended social and economic benefits.



The Heart of the National Forest

The Heart of the National Forest covers around 10 square miles and is a microcosm of the National Forest as a whole. The area was historically worked for coal and clay leaving a landscape and economy in need of restoration and regeneration. Over the last 30 years, the area has been transformed and now accommodates visitor attractions and experiences, tourist accommodation, forest inspired businesses and a network of paths and cycleways set within an emerging forested landscape.

A high proportion of land across the Heart of the National Forest is within public or charitable ownership which, alongside a favourable planning environment for tourism, leisure and woodland economy sectors, creates an opportunity to bring forward the next stage in the redevelopment of the Heart of the National Forest.

The Heart of the National Forest Vision was launched in September 2024 and sets out how we will work with others and the outcomes that collectively we are aiming to achieve. Three investment priorities have been identified to *strengthen the sustainability and character of the Place; inspire and connect us through Experience; and diversify and grow green Enterprise.*

The Vision also identified Six Investment Sites which will unlock opportunities through existing assets and spaces to establish the area as a sustainable destination founded on a low carbon and circular economy, nature and wellbeing.

The NFC and partners are already working hard to progress the Vision with projects underway including upgrades to the cycling and walking infrastructure, masterplanning of the Conkers visitor attraction, improvements to Hicks Lodge Cycling Centre and Moira Furnace and Country Park, restoration of the Albion Landfill complete and restoration of the Donington Island clay stocking yard underway. With the help of expert tourism consultants, we have been working with local landowners to help facilitate the development of sustainable tourism accommodation to encourage more overnight stays and address gaps in current provision.

There is also exciting potential for re-instatement of the Ivanhoe (National Forest) Line for passengers to connect the Heart of the National Forest by rail to the mainline at Burton/Derby and Leicester.

The Vision is available at <https://bit.ly/HOTFVISION>.



Brief

The NFC is seeking to appoint consultants to undertake feasibility work for a new Forest Enterprise Hub (FEH) in the Heart of the National Forest. The work will be delivered in two distinct phases, with phase two dependent on the outcome of phase one, as follows:

Phase 1

Development of the strategic rationale, based upon need, demand and ambition, to inform a robust and innovative concept for the FEH. The outcome of this phase will inform and shape the scope for Phase 2.

Phase 2

Development of an Outline Business Case (OBC) which will include core function/s and facilities (both indoor and outdoor), commercial activities, income generation opportunities, financial appraisal, recommendations for sustainability features, and site design options.

Further details of the deliverables for these phases are provided later in the document.

The Forest Enterprise Hub (FEH)

The concept of a new FEH emerged from the Heart of the National Forest Vision, and subsequent thinking and discussions have identified the following headline opportunities:

1. **A central focal point to showcase nationally important forest-related work** through hosting a programme of conferences and events, visits and talks with both outdoor and indoor spaces. The FEH will be aimed at professional audiences to complement Conkers public facing facility and audiences.
2. **A hub for research and development** to bring together projects with universities, colleges, research institutions and practitioners incorporating teaching / lecture space and field station facilities for students / researchers to undertake basic laboratory / analysis work.
3. **A base for training and skills** working with colleges and training providers to provide learning opportunities for apprenticeship programmes, local volunteer groups, and landowners / businesses within the forests and land management sector linking into the wider National Forest landscape.
4. **Flexible and incubation workspace** to stimulate and nurture innovation and creativity amongst Forest-related enterprises, for example local crafts and wellbeing, strengthening local supply chains and making use of surrounding renewable resources. As well as NFC storage facilities for supplies and equipment which support the management of our wider estate.
5. **Office and meeting space** to relocate the growing NFC team providing security of tenure as freehold rather than the current leasehold arrangements. There may also be the potential for the FEH to provide office space for partners.

The FEH would also be a showcase for the highest standards of sustainable design, through its choice of construction materials, renewable energy production and a



design that has a low carbon footprint. It would need to sensitively integrate with the surrounding natural environment, be nature friendly and promote forest character.

A key aim of the FEH will be to accelerate delivery of national and regional priorities within the forest sector for people's wellbeing, nature recovery and green enterprise.

NFC owned sites in the Heart of the National Forest

The NFC currently owns around 300ha in the Heart of the National Forest which includes Conkers (operated through a third-party), Bath Yard Offices (currently leased), the National Forest Youth Hostel, Camping and Caravaning Club, Albert Village Lake and Princess Diana Memorial Woodland (both with high community use). A further site, Donington Island clay stocking yard is currently being restored and may transfer to the NFC in future.

Conkers

Following a charity merger in 2022, the NFC took ownership of Conkers which is a woodland visitor attraction focussed on discovery, learning and outdoor adventure. It is now managed as a commercial venture by National Forest Enterprises Ltd (a subsidiary company of the NFC) and operated by a third party, Planning Solutions.

The attraction receives just over 200,000 visitors a year, plus 25,000 school educational visits, however following years of underinvestment it is not providing the quality or brand expression of the National Forest.

The NFC has recently created a new brand vision for Conkers, with three headline objectives:

- The most visited woodland visitor attraction in the Midlands where families can explore through creative and nature-based play and immersive experiences all year round.
- A central hub telling the story of the National Forest, providing orientation, access to forest experiences, refreshments, and local produce.
- A centre of excellence for forest outdoor learning where all primary schools in the region will want to visit and educators will come to learn and share best practice.

A masterplan is also being developed to steer future investment and the operating model for the site.

Conkers operates across two adjacent sites separated by a freight railway line and connected by a miniature railway for visitors. The Discovery site is predominantly the main visitor operation, with the Waterside Centre providing education and event space incorporating a café / function room, soft play, amphitheatre and workshop / storage units. Conkers Discovery Centre is out of scope for this piece of work, but there are synergies between the ambitions for the Waterside Centre and those of the FEH, therefore further discussions will be required.



In scope locations

The main location being considered for the FEH is our Feanedock complex which is on the opposite side of Rawdon Road to Conkers, the site covers 95ha and incorporates the following:

Buildings

- Hanging Hill farmhouse (previously a residential let but currently unoccupied and requiring work to be habitable), current thinking is that this would be demolished and form part of the built footprint for the FEH.
- the main barn which provides important storage for managing the NFC estate.

Tenants

- a small area leased to a local council as a tree nursery adjacent to the farmhouse.
- a Farm Business Tenancy on a large expanse of parkland which is currently grazed.
- in adjoining areas (Maybury Wood) there are also fishing lakes with a fishing club and community allotments.

Landscape

- a mixture of young and mature woodland on an undulating landscape with large open rides.
- the site formerly hosted the National Forest Timber festival and at its highest point provides a panoramic view of the Forest's transformation.

Access

- large areas of the site have open public access with a bridleway running through, this forms part of the 75-mile National Forest Way. The area proposed for development does not have public access.
- an access track from Rawdon Road to the farmhouse, with potential for a circular exit through Maybury Wood.

This strategic site is already used to showcase our work and hosts numerous visits throughout the year from universities, colleges and sector partners. It provides an excellent demonstration of landscape transformation and the benefits of mixed land-use including wildflower margins, woodland management, conservation grazing and community benefits.

The site is particularly valuable in terms of advocacy with visits from local and national politicians, decision makers and media.

Other considerations include the Waterside Centre at Conkers and synergy with the emerging masterplan, for example where facilities could be multi-purpose. Waterside has the benefit of good vehicle access (including coaches) and car parking. The masterplan is currently in development and will be shared with the successful consultants.

In addition, the NFC owns offices at Bath Yard that are currently leased, the offices include several small meeting rooms and space for c. 70 employees.

Site plans are included in the Annex A.



Need

The need for the FEH has to date been informed by consultation on the Heart of the National Forest Vision, conversations with partners and through our own observations and operations. Over the past few years as the transformation of the Forest has become evident, along with the positive benefits for the environment, society and economy; the demand from universities, colleges, researchers and other professionals to visit and make use of the area has significantly increased. Currently we are under-resourced with no facilities to support this activity or grow it.

With the NFC evolving towards more of a leadership and coordinating role for the Midlands Forest Network and new National Forests, it will likely need to take on more of the centralised functions, and the need for facilities to support shared learning, coordination and wider sector collaboration is expected to increase.

Nationally we have also witnessed a greater policy focus on tree planting and woodland cover as an enabler for carbon storage, nature recovery, regenerative farming, nature connectedness, climate and nature resilience. The number of trees planted annually is at its highest level for over 20 years which is generating skills and expertise shortages across the sector, with a new Forestry Sector Skills Plan (Royal Forestry Society) launched this year. Environmental research is also more prolific responding to major environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pests and diseases.

With over 30 years of experience the National Forest is a 200 square mile living laboratory demonstrating the challenges and benefits of forest creation at scale, it is a vitally important asset to inform future approaches.

The FEH aims are two-fold:

- **Local** - a base to bring together National Forest partners, businesses and third sector groups to facilitate innovation, enterprise and cross sector working linked to the surrounding landscape, and:
- **National** - a central facility for regional and national partners to promote collaboration and shared learning in relation to forest landscapes.

Scale and funding

Current thinking is that the hub will provide flexible and multi-purpose indoor and outdoor areas, with facilities complementing those of existing assets such as Waterside Centre and Bath Yard offices. The scale of the development will be informed by the level of ambition, need and demand that comes through the stakeholder interviews and strategic rationale stage. Consideration will need to be given to a phased development, recognising that some elements may be more market ready now, with others developed in future phases if capital funds allow.

This feasibility has been funded by Defra, and it is likely that capital funds would be a blend of public and private finance. Within the outline business case income generation opportunities to fund ongoing running costs will be an important consideration for further exploration.



Deliverables

The deliverables required from this commission are:

Phase 1 – Strategic Rationale

1. A compelling and substantiated strategic rationale to include strategic goals and objectives, need and demand, benefit creation, alignment to National Forest brand/vision and government policies/priorities, supported by evidence and insight.
2. Engagement with key stakeholders to inform the ambition, scale and requirements for the FEH, and to identify interest and opportunity for partnership and collaboration.
3. A written report and presentation detailing the above, including recommended next steps and scope for the OBC.
4. Presentation to the Senior Leadership Team (early January 2026 date tbc) which will inform the decision to progress to Phase 2.

Phase 2 – Outline Business Case

This Phase is dependent on the outcome of Phase 1 and the decision of the Senior Leadership Team to progress to Phase 2.

5. An evidenced and robust OBC that presents a preferred and viable route for the FEH. This will include:
 - i. core functions and facilities (indoor and outdoor)
 - ii. potential partners
 - iii. commercial models for income generation
 - iv. draft site plan
 - v. financial appraisal (including estimated capital investment and income generation potential with forecast pay-back period / ROI)
 - vi. capital fundraising options
 - vii. recommendations for next steps.
6. An assessment of the suitability of the Feanedock complex with sufficient detail to inform a pre-planning application.
7. A prospectus / brochure to promote the FEH to decision-makers, partners, funders and investors (*content and images to be provided by consultants with our brand agents doing design and print*).
8. Presentation to the Senior Leadership Team (April 2026).

We respect and value the expertise of consultants and are happy to receive variations on the above.

Stakeholders

We would anticipate c.25 interviews as part of the stakeholder engagement including NFC staff and trustees, Defra, Forestry Commission, Forest Research, Forestry England, Woodland Trust, Sylva Foundation, university and colleges, East Midlands Combined Authority, local authorities etc. Contacts will be identified by NFC, however we would also welcome suggestions from the successful consultants.



Budget and contract period

The maximum budget for Phase 1 and Phase 2 combined is £65,000 excl. VAT. With the maximum budget for Phase 1 £25,000 excl. VAT. Please note the work package for Phase 2, if progressed, will be renegotiated based on the outcome of Phase 1.

Tenders will be reviewed based on the Evaluation Approach below.

We anticipate that Phase 1 will be completed by the end of 2025, with a decision whether to progress to the OBC made in early January 2026. We are aiming for both phases to be completed by 31st March 2026 to comply with funding requirements.

Information to be included in the tender submission

- Methodology.
- Details of the consortia (if applicable) and CVs of the proposed team.
- Project director and team organigram, roles and responsibilities.
- Examples of comparable work by the proposed team.
- Knowledge and expertise within the environmental / sustainability sector.
- Detailed project and reporting timeline.
- Day rates and number of days for each person.
- Payment schedule. (Note: prices must be exclusive of VAT. If VAT will not be applicable, this must be clearly stated.)
- Tenders must include separate quotes for phase one and phase two (noting phase two may be renegotiated once fully scoped).
- Three relevant references that we could contact.

An electronic copy of the completed proposal must be emailed to shadfield@nationalforest.org by Monday, 27th October 2025 by 12 noon. Please quote Tender Reference: FEH/102025.

The Declaration by Tenderer (Annex B) must be completed, signed and dated by a duly authorised representative on behalf of the tenderer and returned with the proposal.

Timeline of the procurement

Please acknowledge whether your organisation will be taking up this Invitation to Tender by return email to shadfield@nationalforest.org. This will enable us to share responses to questions which will be circulated by Monday, 20th October (or sooner).

Procurement stage	Timeline
Tender Published	w/c 22 nd September
Deadline for questions	Monday, 13 th October by 12 noon
Responses to questions issued	Monday, 20 th October (or sooner)
Deadline for receipt of proposals	Monday, 27 th October by 12 noon
Shortlisting	w/c 27 th October
Interviews if required	Friday, 7 th November
Notification of contract	w/c 10 th November



Evaluation approach

NFC will assess supplier proposals using the criteria in the table below, and selected suppliers will be invited to interview to present and discuss their proposals. We will award the contract based on the “most advantageous offer – in the opinion of NFC”.

We reserve the right to accept any tender in whole or in part and may choose to split the award of contract accordingly. In the event that none of the responses are deemed satisfactory we reserve the right to consider alternative procurement options.

No tender will be deemed to have been accepted unless such acceptance has been notified to the tenderer in writing.

Evaluation criteria	Section weighting
Understanding of the brief and the opportunity.	10%
Clarity and robustness of the methodology, allowing flexibility for new ideas and innovation.	30%
Professional and technical ability and relevant experience and expertise.	30%
Suppliers fit with the ethos and values of the National Forest.	10%
Value for Money.	20%

Instructions on and conditions of the tendering process

Without limitation to the generality of the above, NFC has not made and will not make any contract, agreement or representation that a contract shall be offered (either directly by it or on its behalf) in accordance with any invitation to submit a proposal, communications with any other party, or at all.

Any agreement clauses and schedules submitted to you during the procurement process are draft documents and do not constitute a contract offer. All documentation is subject to contract and is used in this process without prejudice to NFC’s legal position or that of any agent or representative of NFC.

NFC does not accept any responsibility for any estimates made by you of resources to be employed in meeting our requirements or for any other assumption which you may have drawn or will draw from any pre-contract discussions. Statements by NFC (whether directly or by its agents or representatives) as to the future process and timing of the procurement reflect our current intentions, and we reserve the right to vary the procurement procedure, scope or timing by notice in writing, including terminating it altogether.



NFC does not warrant that the information provided herein is complete, correct or independently verified and the procurement documentation provided by us does not purport to be comprehensive. Whilst all reasonable endeavours have been, and will be, made to inform you accurately of our requirements you should form your own conclusions about the methods and resources needed to meet these requirements. Neither NFC nor any of its appointed advisors accept any liability for representations, writings, negotiations or understandings in connection with the procurement made by NFC (whether directly or by its agents or representatives), except in respect of any fraudulent misrepresentation made by it.

Basis of involvement in the procurement

Your participation in the procurement is conditional upon you agreeing to and complying with these instructions and conditions. Failure to comply with these instructions and conditions shall entitle us to cease to involve you in the procurement without liability on our part.

Consortia and sub-contracting

Where a consortium or sub-contracting approach is proposed, all information requested should be given in respect of the proposed prime contractor or consortium leader. Relevant information should also be provided in respect of consortium members or sub-contractors who will play a significant role in the delivery of services or products under any ensuing contract. Responses must enable NFC to assess the overall service proposed.

Where the proposed prime contractor is a special purpose vehicle or holding company, information should be provided on the extent to which it will call upon the resources and expertise of its members.

We recognise that arrangements in relation to consortia and sub-contracting may be subject to future change. Service providers/suppliers should therefore respond in the light of such arrangements as are currently envisaged.

Please provide details of the proportion of any contract awarded under this contract that the prospective partner proposes to subcontract.

Non-collusion and inducements

You shall ensure that your involvement in the procurement is a bona fide participation in a competitive procurement, aimed at obtaining the award of a Contract Agreement on the grounds of best value for money to NFC, without any form of collusion with any other participant in the procurement in relation to the financial or other terms of any bid which they may be invited to submit or make any attempt to influence any agent, employee or advisor to NFC or to obtain information from them about another bidder.

Confidentiality of tenders

All parties agree that each shall keep confidential all information which has either been designated in writing as confidential or that ought reasonably to be considered confidential including all information which relates to the business and affairs of the other party (and the other party's suppliers, service providers, agents and representatives) and all information which either party receives or obtains as a result of its involvement in the procurement.



You agree that you will use such information as is provided to you under this procurement process solely for the purpose of evaluating whether or not you agree to tender or to perform any obligations which a bidder may or must undertake. You must keep all materials containing confidential information in a secure place and return all copies to us at our request.

By submitting a tender proposal, you are giving your consent to your data being stored and processed for the purposes of awarding this contract.

Freedom of Information

The National Forest Company are subject to The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Act) and The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). As part of our duties under the Act or EIR, the NFC may need to disclose information about the procurement process or the Contract to anyone who makes a reasonable request.

If Tenderers think that any of the information given in their Tender is commercially sensitive (meaning it could reasonably cause prejudice to the organisation if disclosed to a third party); then Tenderers should clearly mark this as 'Not for disclosure to third parties' and give valid reasons in support of the information being exempt from disclosure under the Act and the EIR.

Tenderers should be aware that, even where they have indicated that information is commercially sensitive, the NFC might be required to disclose it under the Act or EIR if a request is received.

Tenderers should also note that the receipt of any material marked 'confidential' or equivalent by the NFC should not be taken to mean that the NFC accepts any duty of confidence by virtue of that marking.

Economic and Financial standing enquiries

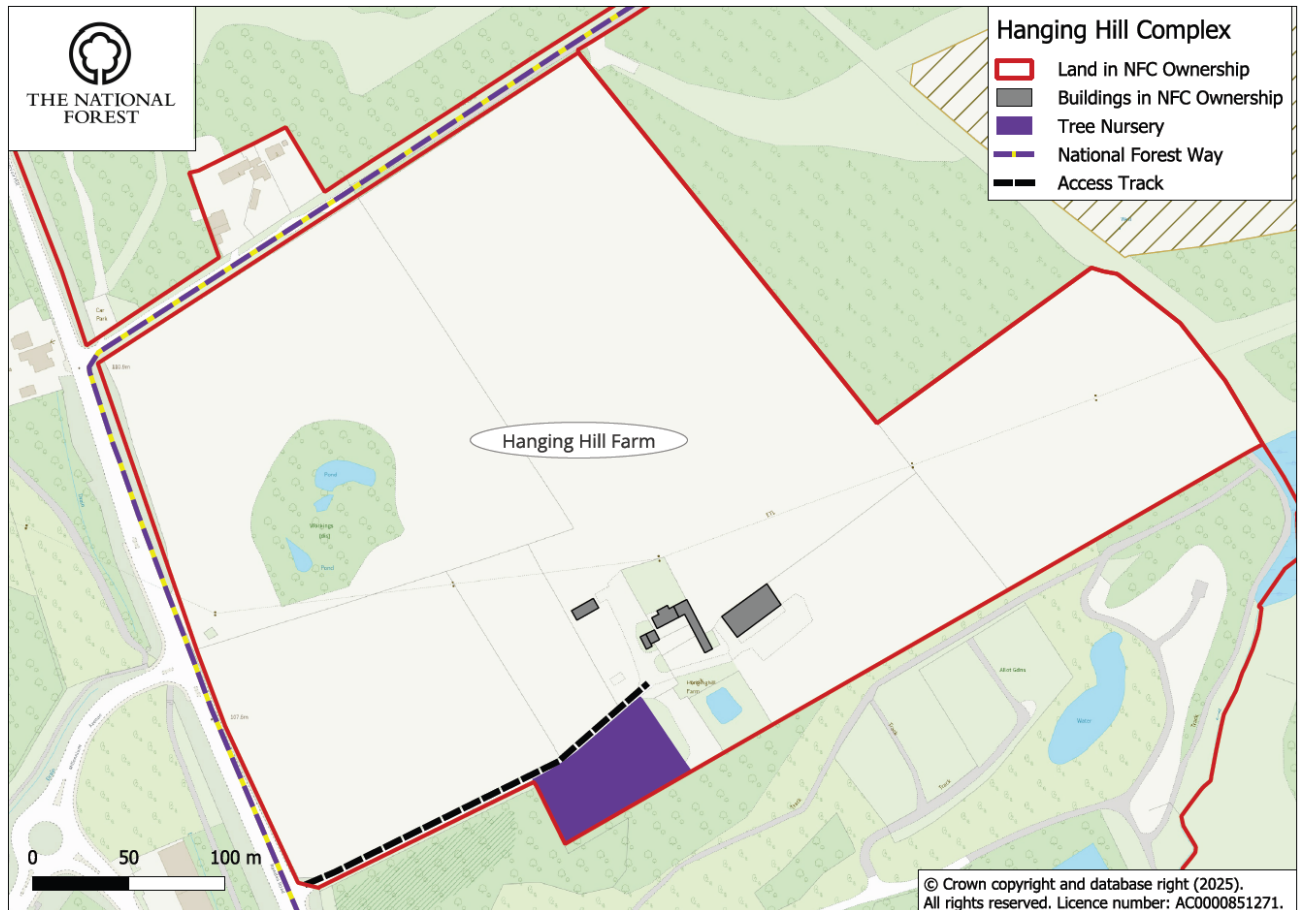
We reserve the right to make further enquiries into the financial standing of tenderers and that of its partners/associates up to the point immediately prior to award and to seek commercial references where it feels this is appropriate. Bidders must cooperate fully with any enquiries that we make about their financial standing. Any change or potential change which affects or might affect a bidder's financial standing must be notified to us immediately.

Costs and expenses

We accept no liability to pay any costs and expenses which may be incurred by or on behalf of you and your consortium members in preparing for or participating in any part of the procurement process.

Other than in the event of a breach of these instructions and conditions of procurement by you, you shall not be liable under these instructions and conditions of procurement to pay any of the costs and expenses of NFC in connection with any part of the procurement process.

Annex A – Site Plans





Annex B

Declaration by Tenderer

On completion of the tender submission/proposal, please read the declaration below. This page should then be printed, completed, signed by a duly authorised signatory, scanned and returned by email with the tender submission/proposal.

I ("the Bidder") certify and warrant that:-

1. All information supplied in the tender submission/proposal (including any accompanying documents and declarations) submitted by the Bidder is true, accurate and complete in every respect.
2. Neither the Bidder nor any Relevant Bidder has entered into any agreement or arrangement with any other person (including without limitation any other Potential Bidder(s)) in connection with this Procurement and the completion of the tender submission/proposal.
3. Neither the Bidder, nor any of its subsidiaries or Relevant Organisations is or has at any time engaged in any activity, practice or conduct which would constitute an offence under any laws (including without limitation the Bribery Act 2010).
4. No officer, employee or Associated Person of the Bidder or any of its subsidiaries or Relevant Organisations (Associated Person meaning in relation to a company or any person including an employee, agent or Business Function who performs or has performed services for or on that company's behalf) has:-
 - (a) bribed another person (within the meaning of section 7(3) of the Bribery Act 2010) intending to obtain or retain business or an advantage in the conduct of business for the Bidder and/or any of the subsidiaries or Relevant Organisations, and the Bidder and each of the subsidiaries and Relevant Organisations has in place adequate procedures in line with the guidance published by the Secretary of State under section 9 of the Bribery Act 2010 designed to prevent their Associated Persons from undertaking any such conduct;
 - (b) directly or indirectly offered, given, procured or received any gift, loan, fee, reward, advantage or other consideration which:-
 - i. is deemed illegal under the Bribery Act 2010, or which has contravened, or was intended to result in the contravention of, the laws of any jurisdiction;
 - ii. (whether or not it is lawful) is in the nature of a bribe, influence payment or kickback or similarly has an ulterior or covert purpose;
 - iii. or has agreed, conspired or attempted to, or assisted any other person to, do any such thing.
5. Neither the Bidder nor any of the subsidiaries nor any of their Associated Persons is or has been the subject of any investigation, inquiry or enforcement proceedings by any governmental, administrative or regulatory body or any customer regarding any offence or alleged offence under the Bribery Act 2010, and no such investigation, inquiry or proceedings have been threatened or are



pending and there are no circumstances likely to give rise to any such investigation, inquiry or proceedings.

6. The Bidder agrees that it shall be responsible for any failure by itself or any part of its function, by any officer, employee or Associated Person of the Bidder, parts of the Bidder to comply with the requirements of this declaration.
7. Expressions used in this declaration shall, unless otherwise stated, have the meanings assigned to them in this document issued by NFC.

SIGNED for and on behalf of

.....
Signed

.....
Print Name

.....
Title

.....
Date



Registered Charity Number 1166563.
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National Forest Company
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