



800 years ago, on 6 November 1217, the ten year old Henry III, King of England, signed the **Charter of the Forest**, which for the first time protected the freedom of ordinary people to make a living from forest land.

Today people use the word 'forest' to mean 'a large area of land covered with trees' but in those days forest meant a much bigger area made up of woods and open spaces, including fields and even villages. William the Conqueror and his heirs had claimed much of England as Royal Forest; for example, the whole of Essex was a Royal Forest before it was later reduced to four smaller forests including Waltham Forest.

Before the Charter was signed by Henry III, the king and nobles had the right to make Forest Law which meant that anyone living on the land had to obey strict rules which ensured that the king and his friends could hunt deer and use the timber for themselves. This made life very difficult for those living in the Royal Forests.

The people living on the land could not hunt deer or put up fences or hedges to protect their crops from being eaten by them. They couldn't collect berries and nuts to eat or let their animals graze in the forest, or even collect firewood. There were harsh punishments for people who broke the Forest Law.

The Forest Charter gave people the right of their pigs and cows to feed on forest land. You could still be imprisoned for taking the king's deer but people could forage from the forest: autumn berries, fruit and fungi; birds' eggs, wild honey and herbs. The Forest Charter also allowed people who lived within the forests to collect and carry firewood free of charge.

The Forest Charter made a huge difference to the lives of people living 800 years ago. And because it gave legal rights to ordinary people, the Charter of the Forest is sometimes referred to as the Charter of





Charter

for Trees, Woods
and People

The Charter for Trees, Woods and People was launched in Lincoln on 6 November 2017, the 800 anniversary of the **Charter of the Forest**. The Charter is a call to stop taking trees for granted, recognise and celebrate their huge contribution to our lives, and take responsibility for their welfare.

The people of the UK have a right to the benefits brought by trees and woods and the new charter will recognise, celebrate and protect this right.

Sign the Charter at www.treecharter.uk
and a tree will be planted for every signature.

