

Supplementary Design Note

Materials Ethic, Design Response and Indicative Materials Palette

Application Ref: 25/00819/OUT

Site: Forest Hill

Proposal: Hotel development

Date: 23 April 2026

1. Purpose of this note

This note is submitted to support the outline application by providing a clearer, design-led explanation of the intended material character of the proposed hotel. It is written to be readable both by the local planning authority and by the National Forest Company design team.

It has been widened beyond the Sustainable Tourism Accommodation Design Guide alone. The note now draws together the principal currently published National Forest Company sources identified as directly relevant to design, materials, landscape integration and development character, and translates them into a project-specific material ethic for Forest Hill.

The note remains proportionate to outline stage. It establishes the intended design direction, material hierarchy and architectural character, but does not seek to fix final product selection, proprietary systems, detailed junction design or manufacturers at this stage.

2. National Forest Company source framework

The following National Forest Company sources have informed this note. Together they give a broader design and material framework than the tourism accommodation guide on its own:

- A National Forest design guide: Sustainable tourism accommodation - the primary source for built form, material tone, visible timber, low carbon construction, energy performance and landscape-led visitor accommodation.
- Planning and development (National Forest website) - confirms the importance of creating development that is part of National Forest character, and the expectation that new development contributes to the wider Forest vision.
- Planting Hope - sets out the National Forest model, including aligned policy and the ambition to encourage the highest quality development that delivers for the Forest.
- Our Vision for the Heart of the National Forest - relevant because it explicitly links new or re-purposed buildings to the highest standards of sustainable design, choice of materials, integration with the natural environment and local character, and strengthening sense of place.

- National Forest Strategy / 25 Year Vision to 2045 context, as referenced in the National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 - relevant as the current strategic context for long-term place-making, climate response and net zero for carbon.
- Quantification of the Timber Resource - relevant because it evidences the National Forest Company's interest in timber as a construction material and in the longer-term use of National Forest timber in building.
- Economic impact and future economic potential - relevant because it describes the Forest's distinctive offer through landscape quality, visitor experience and destination value.

3. Main design and materials themes arising from the wider National Forest material

3.1 Forest character and sense of place

Across the National Forest material there is a consistent expectation that development should feel rooted in the Forest rather than simply located within it. The planning webpage emphasises development that is part of National Forest character. Planting Hope refers to planning policies that create attractive settings for new development. The Heart of the National Forest vision goes further, stating that new or re-purposed buildings should strengthen sense of place through sustainable design, choice of materials, and integration with the natural environment and local character.

For Forest Hill, this means the hotel should read as a calm and landscape-responsive building whose setting, material tone and architectural expression reinforce the wider National Forest character, rather than introducing an urban, generic or corporate appearance.

3.2 Visible timber and natural materials

The strongest and most explicit National Forest design direction remains the accommodation guide's statement that the 'visible use of timber' should be incorporated into new built form, whether through 'green oak beams or timber cladding'. This is directly relevant to the hotel and supports timber cladding as the principal visible wall material.

The same guide also promotes natural, low-processing and breathable materials, and notes that 'wood shingle cladding suits the National Forest character'. Read together, these points support a timber-led material palette, simple detailing, natural texture and a restrained use of secondary materials.

3.3 Materials should be robust, low processing and responsibly sourced

The accommodation guide's 'Build ethically & sustainably' section is important not just for sustainability, but also for design quality. It links the National Forest ambition to construction choices, material sourcing, circularity and durability. The guide calls for 'natural materials', encourages low carbon construction, and says applicants should 'source materials responsibly'.

For this proposal, the design implication is that the palette should be modest, durable and honest in its expression, favouring timber and other simple materials that weather well and avoid unnecessary processing or visual clutter.

3.4 Landscape integration and movement through the site

The wider National Forest documents do not treat architecture in isolation. They consistently link buildings with landscape structure, habitat value, walking and cycling, and the shaping of coherent places. The Heart of the National Forest vision speaks about new development integrating with natural habitats and supporting a wider walking and cycling network. The planning webpage and Planting Hope both emphasise landscape structure and overall environmental quality as part of development.

That is relevant to materials because the building palette should help the hotel sit within a greener and more natural setting. Hard materials immediately around the building should therefore remain simple, muted and secondary to access, landscape structure and public realm.

3.5 Energy and building performance as supporting design criteria

The National Forest design material also supports strong building performance, but it does so as part of an overall design approach rather than as the sole architectural driver. The accommodation guide refers to improving thermal performance, maximising insulation and airtightness, and notes that buildings may meet or exceed Building Regulations or higher standards such as Passivhaus.

Within this note, that point is acknowledged only as a supporting compliance matter. The primary emphasis remains on National Forest character, timber expression, landscape integration and material quality.

4. Project-specific materials ethic for the proposed hotel

The proposed hotel should be read as a contemporary rural building shaped by the National Forest setting. The material language should be simple, confident and quiet: timber-led, natural in appearance, and recessive in tone.

The building should not rely on a wide or overly decorative palette. Instead, a small number of carefully chosen materials should be used consistently so that the architecture feels coherent and durable. The principal expression should come from timber cladding, depth, rhythm, shadow and proportion, rather than from multiple competing finishes.

The hotel should avoid a standardised commercial appearance. Bright corporate cladding systems, reflective surfaces, stark white joinery, and urban-standard detailing would not reflect the National Forest character as clearly as a restrained timber, dark metal and grounded masonry palette.

The use of timber to the main elevations is not proposed as a superficial motif. It is the central architectural response to the National Forest material, directly reflecting the published direction on 'visible use of timber' and 'timber cladding'.

Secondary materials should be used to support the timber rather than compete with it. Masonry or stone is best kept to plinths, retaining edges, service areas or other grounded elements. Roof finishes should be dark and recessive. Openings, trims and rainwater goods should also remain visually quiet.

Publicly visible interior spaces should continue the same language through timber and other natural finishes. This reflects the guide's recommendation to use 'wood and other natural materials' in visible guest areas and helps the architecture feel consistent from outside to inside.

Overall, the design objective is a hotel that feels rooted in its setting, contemporary in form, robust in construction, and clearly aligned with the wider National Forest design narrative.

5. Indicative external and public-facing materials palette

The following schedule is intentionally parameter-level. It is intended to confirm the likely design direction at outline stage, while allowing appropriate detailed design development at reserved matters and condition discharge stages.

Element	Indicative material / finish	Tone / character	Design response / National Forest note
Primary hotel elevations	Vertical timber cladding as the dominant visible wall material. Durable species or modified timber to be confirmed later.	Natural timber weathering to silver-grey, or a muted stained brown / umber / grey-brown finish.	Direct response to the National Forest design guide's 'visible use of timber' and 'timber cladding'.
Feature areas / entrance elements	Shingle or other smaller-format timber cladding, expressed timber framing, or feature timber boarding to entrances and selected accent areas.	Textured, natural and tactile rather than decorative.	Supports the guide's note that 'wood shingle cladding suits the National Forest character'.
Plinth / lower level grounded elements	Limited brick, stone or reconstituted stone plinths; robust treatment to splash zones, retaining edges and service conditions.	Dark red-brown, charcoal, brindled or earthy stone tones.	Provides durability and visual grounding while allowing the upper form to remain timber-led.
Roof finish	Dark non-reflective metal, or slate-effect finish,	Dark grey / green	Supports a quiet roofscape so the building sits comfortably

	subject to final roof form and detailing.	recessive within the landscape.	within the landscape rather than standing out against it.
Windows and external doors	Dark-framed aluminium, alu-clad timber or similar high-quality systems.	Dark bronze, dark grey or black.	Keeps openings visually recessive and avoids a bright or overly domestic appearance.
Canopies, screens and balustrades	Timber posts, timber battens and dark metal secondary elements.	Simple, lightweight and subordinate to the main building form.	Reinforces the timber language without overcomplicating the facade.
Rainwater goods, flashings and trims	Powder-coated metal or equivalent robust finish.	Dark and visually quiet.	Avoids bright or highly contrasting trim lines that would interrupt the building's calm appearance.
External hard materials near the hotel	Permeable gravel, bound gravel, muted block paving or limited stone paving to principal arrival points.	Natural aggregate colours; restrained and rural in character.	Allows landscape and movement routes to remain the main foreground elements.
Public-facing internal spaces	Neutral finishes to reception, lounge and circulation spaces.	Warm, tactile, natural and durable.	Reflects the National Forest guide's direction to use 'wood and other natural materials' in visible guest environments.

6. Cross-reference to the wider National Forest material

For ease of review, the main relationship between this proposal and the wider National Forest Company material can be summarised as follows:

- The Sustainable Tourism Accommodation Design Guide remains the primary source for visible timber, natural materials, responsible sourcing, low carbon construction and building performance.
- The Planning and Development material confirms that development should contribute to National Forest character through landscaping, green infrastructure and overall design quality.
- Planting Hope broadens the argument from building design to policy and delivery, including the ambition to encourage high quality development for the Forest.
- The Heart of the National Forest vision adds a clear place-shaping emphasis by linking sustainable design, choice of materials, local character, habitat integration and sense of place.
- The current National Forest Strategy context reinforces why new development should align with long-term ambitions for place, climate response and net zero.

- The Timber Resource and Economic Impact documents help support timber as a meaningful material choice within the wider National Forest identity and visitor destination.

7. Outline-stage note on technical development

This is a design note rather than a technical specification. Final product selection, build-ups, thermal calculations, manufacturers and detailed junctions will be developed at the appropriate later stage.

Nothing in the design-led material approach set out here would prevent the building from being developed to meet enhanced building performance standards, including Passivhaus criteria if the applicant chooses to pursue that route. That point is noted for completeness only and is not the primary purpose of this document.

8. Suggested planning statement

The proposed hotel adopts a timber-led and landscape-responsive material palette that has been developed from the wider body of National Forest Company design, planning and strategy material, and not solely from the Sustainable Tourism Accommodation Design Guide. The approach gives priority to visible timber, natural materials, responsible sourcing, landscape integration and a calm contemporary rural expression. At outline stage, the note establishes the intended architectural character, material hierarchy and National Forest design response in sufficient detail for the proposal's appearance to be understood, while leaving final product selection and detailed specification to later stages.

9. National Forest Company references used in this note

- National Forest Company, A National Forest design guide: Sustainable tourism accommodation.
- National Forest Company, Planning and development webpage.
- National Forest Company, Planting Hope.
- National Forest Company, Our Vision for the Heart of the National Forest.
- National Forest Company, Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 (for current National Forest Strategy / 25 Year Vision context).
- National Forest Company, Quantification of the Timber Resource.
- National Forest Company, The National Forest - Economic impact and future economic potential.