

Woodland and forestry policy for A Living Landscape



Woods and forests can moderate climate change and reconnect our landscape



The Bleas complex, Kent. Here Kent Wildlife Trust is creating wildlife highways between existing nature reserves and creating new woodland. (photo: Nick Powell)

How can woodland and forestry help deliver A Living Landscape?

With a woodland cover of only about 12%, the UK is now one of the least forested countries in Europe. Woodland, however, is one of our richest wildlife habitats. Natural forest is highly diverse – wet woodlands of alders and willows in flood plains; birch and oaks on acid, sandy and peaty soils; the Caledonian pinewoods of Scotland; ash or beech on clays and chalk, along with all the open habitats of grassland, marshland and heathland that would have permeated a natural forest.

Trees and woodland are important for climate change adaptation because they provide a wide range of microclimates by creating shade and higher humidity. Woodland, especially wooded corridors and belts of trees, can also physically connect up the landscape, by allowing species movement and dispersal (see Fig 1).

For example, Sussex Wildlife Trust's West Weald Living Landscape scheme is enhancing and reconnecting core areas of forest in the West Weald, including two Sussex Wildlife Trust reserves. This will help to conserve the populations of rare woodland species such as the pearl bordered fritillary and barbastelle bat.

A Living Landscape should include areas of woodland sustainably managed to produce raw materials or fuel; open woodland used for grazing and vast expanses of forest protecting water catchments. Well managed woods are popular places for relaxation and healthy walks too - good for people as well as for wildlife. In a recent MIND report 94 per cent of participants said that green exercise activities had benefited their mental health¹. Forest policy is already beginning to recognise the multiple values

What do we propose?

- * **More support for working woodlands** The Government should provide more support for sustainable woodland management to boost sustainable energy forms, such as wood fuel. This could cover: support for growth and management of woodlands, as well as for market infrastructure and/or support for woodland produce. Some progress has been made but this form of sustainable energy production remains under-utilised.
- * **Enhance the Forestry Commission's role** The Forestry Commission's positive role should be enhanced. It should be given the resources and responsibility to contribute to partnerships around the country to support Living Landscape projects, sometimes through financing or implementing strategic land acquisition.
- * **Connect woodlands to surrounding habitats** Land use policy should encourage large-scale habitat mosaics and the merging of boundaries between wooded and open habitats. The value of these habitat mosaics should be recognised and funded because of the range of services they deliver.
- * **New developments should incorporate tree planting** Appropriate trees and woodland should be key components in new developments to improve the 'permeability' of urban areas. The role of trees in helping us to adapt to a changing climate will be increasingly vital.

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of woodland. In a changing climate this is even more important.

Woods and forests are a key defence against climate change. They not only store carbon but also cool the environment in summer – a vital function of the street trees and wooded parks in our towns and cities. Trees can also strip pollution from the air, and provide shaded microhabitats for wildlife.

Are there barriers to woodland and forestry policy delivering A Living Landscape?

Lack of incentives

The development of forestry policy in the UK over the last two decades has done a great deal to support sustainable management and protect wildlife but there are still problem areas: woodland management is a sustainable industry, but many of our woods have become neglected because of the low returns and lack of incentives. Natural England have said that a lack of woodland management in England has caused a 50% decline in our woodland butterflies². The Forestry Commission³ is actively promoting sustainable multi-value forestry and the planting of native trees, but there are few resources available for strategic land acquisition or to support partnership projects.

Woods as part of a joined-up landscape

Problems arise from considering woods in isolation. Areas where woods overlap and merge with other habitats are some of our most diverse and wildlife-rich places. However, it is difficult to support mixed habitats like this through existing policy. A large scale Living Landscape requires these dynamic woodland edge habitats.

¹ Ecotherapy, MIND (2007)

² State of The Natural Environment Report, Natural England, 2008

³ In Northern Ireland this is the Northern Ireland Forest Service.

Case studies



Fig 1. Forest of Feckenham –

In the Forest of Feckenham Worcestershire Wildlife Trust is working with landowners, local communities and local authorities to protect and enhance this special woodland. In the face of climate change and habitat fragmentation the Trust is taking a landscape-scale approach; conserving and expanding the best sites for wildlife and creating new habitat-rich links between them.



(photo: Keith Warrington)

Fig 2. Silver washed fritillary –

Changes in woodland management and the cessation of coppicing have been linked to the decline of this once common species which lives in sunny woodland clearings. It was widespread across England and Wales, but is now restricted to southern and south-western England.