

Summary

The Woodland Trust is passionate about the need to double nativeⁱ woodland cover in the UK not only to create more beautiful landscapes and help wildlife prosper but also to improve the quality of everyone’s lives. We strongly advocate more new native woods throughout the UK in lowland, upland and urban areas; creating new woodland is a powerful and positive step to making a better future for all.

Background – how much woodland planting is happening and by whom?

The UK is one of the least wooded countries in Europe with only 11.8% of total land area covered with forests and woodsⁱⁱ compared with a European average of 44% (EU 37%ⁱⁱⁱ). Of the UK’s 2.8 million hectares (ha) of woodland, only around 1.2 million ha are native and/or broadleaved in character^{iv}. Total woodland cover has nonetheless expanded from a low of 5% at the turn of the 20th century. Planting rates accelerated during the 1920s – 1980s, due to planting of quick growing conifer crops originally to deliver a strategic reserve of timber after World War One and later to supply a timber processing industry. In recent years the rate of woodland expansion has slowed and shifted to mainly broadleaved planting. In 2006/7 10,700 ha of new woodland was planted of which 8,500 ha was broadleaved.^v

The four countries of the UK have adopted contrasting attitudes to woodland expansion in the future.^{vi} The table below shows existing woodland cover and targets for expansion for each country. Scotland and Northern Ireland have targets which could allow for native woodland expansion on a reasonable scale. By contrast England and Wales fare badly with no expansion targets contained within their respective forestry strategies, albeit the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) calls for at least 165,000 ha of new native woodland by 2030, an often forgotten commitment.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Broad-leaved (ha)</i>	<i>Conifer (ha)</i>	<i>All woodland (ha)</i>	<i>Woodland creation targets set by country forest strategy or UK BAP</i>	<i>Amount of planting needed (conifer & broadleaved) to achieve target</i>
England	757,000	367,000	1,124,000	80,000 ha native woodland by 2030	3200 ha per year
Scotland	293,000	1,048,000	1,341,000	Increase from 17-25% tree cover by 2050 – 650,000 ha	14500 ha per year
Wales	127,000	158,000	285,000	BAP targets of 3730 ha of new native woodland by 2030	150 ha per year
Northern Ireland	20,000	66,000	87,000	6-12% woodland cover by 2056, 87,000 hectares	1740 ha per year

UK	1,197,000	1,640,000	2,837,000	820,730	19500 ha per year
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Woodland creation is mainly delivered by NGOs, private land owners and other institutions such as local authorities and developers. Only 7% of all woodland creation^{vii} in the UK now takes place on state-owned Forestry Commission (FC) or Northern Ireland Forest Service (NIFS) land, most of which happens in Northern Ireland.

Context

Creating new woodland is a highly personal decision for many individual landowners. At present it is not an attractive one for most owners because of rising land values and agricultural commodity prices, lower levels of return on investment from forestry than from agriculture, low levels of grant, more attractive options for short term returns from land, complex rules relating to single farm payments and woodland, lack of knowledge, cultural resistance, and the permanence of land use change resulting from creating woodland. Yet some do so because they have stronger motivations than just gaining an economic return; they may value the beauty of landscapes enhanced by woods, have a strong sense of future stewardship, and appreciate the positive contributions that woodland make to their own lives.

Native and non-native

As the table shows there are commitments to expand both the broadleaved (mainly native) and conifer (mainly non-native) woodland cover in the UK. The Trust recognises the value of trees of all kinds, especially in urban areas, and that woodland including non native conifer plantations can also contribute to the range of benefits that woodland provides. But we particularly espouse the creation of more native woodland particularly for landscape and biodiversity reasons – native woodland new and old is richer in and more attractive to wildlife; creating native woodland rather than non native woodland is less likely to accelerate current rates of change in the natural world and therefore reduce environmental stress on an already fragmented and vulnerable resource.

So why create more woodland?

We think there are twelve compelling reasons to create more woodland especially native woodland.

People and places

- Most people either have a latent or live passion for trees and woods^{viii}. Planting a tree whether as an adult or a child to help create a new wood is a simple powerful and emotional metaphor for creating hope for the future..
- Woods are a great place for people to get away from the stresses of modern life to enjoy gentle physical exercise and mental relaxation whether you live in the city, the town or the countryside^x. A clear link between the presence of trees and improved hospital recovery rates also emphasises the value of trees and woods to human health and well being^x. Yet less than 10% of the UK population live within easy walking distance of a wood even assuming all were open to the public – so we need to create new woods to make up this deficit.^{xi}

- Towns and cities with a high proportion of tree and woodland cover benefit from the ameliorating effects of trees; trapping particulates, reducing urban noise and UV radiation, and providing shading and cooling to people and buildings. These effects will become more important with projected climate change^{xii}.

Nature

- The probability of woodland biodiversity surviving into the future is dependent on there being more native woodland. As a habitat, native woodland contains more threatened species than any other habitat in the UK and, by creating new woods in the right places alongside wildlife habitats particularly in areas where they are concentrated, we can help make our fragmented countryside and the wildlife which depends on it more resilient to climate change in the future.

Water

- Creating new woods as well as conserving and restoring native/broadleaved woods, can improve water quality, reduce localised flooding, and may alleviate the effects of larger floods.^{xiii}

Landscapes, old and new

- The UK is a signatory to the European Landscape Convention which commits us to protecting and enhancing landscape quality. Many (though by no means all) parts of the UK were once typified by wooded landscapes and the Landscape Character approach provides a helpful way of targeting woodland creation to enhance the distinctive character and beauty of many landscapes which have been either lost or changed for the worse over the years.
- Transforming derelict land and creating new landscapes through creating woodland quickly improves the physical appearance of degraded landscapes, adding to property values, attracting inward investment and giving areas a sense of place and value. The National Forest and the Central Scotland Forest are shining large scale example of this process but there are also many others.

Climate change mitigation

- We have an international responsibility to create new woods and forests in our own backyard. The work done by the UK to support re-forestation globally as part of our response to climate change has to be backed up by setting a good example at home.
- Wood is a renewable resource which can be substituted for other products with higher embedded energy and carbon costs. Although we believe that ancient semi-natural woods that only cover around 1% of the UK should be managed primarily with wildlife in mind, woods whose primary function is to produce timber can be attractive places fulfilling a wide range of purposes. The UK imports 85% of our timber requirements. Bringing existing woods into commercial production will not significantly bring down our reliance on imports, so we need new woods to provide this natural renewable resource.
- Woodland creation can play a role in mitigating the impacts of climate change. Woodland planted since 1990 is already making a contribution to reducing atmospheric CO₂ and increasing UK carbon sinks. Current rates of afforestation in

the UK contribute 2-3% of the UK's Kyoto Protocol commitment to reduce or sequester carbon emissions by 12.5% over 1990 levels.^{xiv}

Climate change adaptation,

- We believe that a functional network of woodland will assist woodland biodiversity to adapt to changing environmental conditions. We also believe that larger woodlands are likely to be more resilient to the effects of climate change than smaller woodlands.

Our vision for woodland creation

Our overall vision for the future is of a rejuvenated and inspiring landscape, far richer in woods and forests than at present where new woods, amongst a mosaic of habitats, are making a fundamental difference to the quality of human life and the wildlife and natural services on which we all ultimately depend.

In the lowlands we wish to see more new woods close to people playing an indispensable role in providing places for rest and relaxation, putting the character back into landscapes which have become bereft of trees in recent decades and becoming an integral part of farmed landscapes combining use and beauty.

We also strongly believe that the uplands of the UK could be far richer in trees and extensive woodland cover than at present. There is a genuine opportunity to consider imaginative schemes to encourage natural regeneration through reduction in grazing pressure, and reestablishment of wood pasture (i.e. wooded landscapes with much lower density tree cover). Forested hills and mountains should be places of great beauty, able to sustain new upland economies and inspirational wild places for visitors; these places will be improvement over the impoverished and often overgrazed moorlands and upland grasslands of certain large parts of the UK's uplands and fulfil valuable roles in improving water catchment management as well. While we would never wish to establish tree cover on important upland semi-natural habitats such as blanket bogs and upland grasslands. not all of the uplands should be sacrosanct and seen as non-wooded wilderness since much of it has been artificially denuded of trees.

We also see a future where the so-called urban forest, including urban woodland cover, is far more extensive than it is today, where people and woodland co-exist to mutual benefit, and where high quality green spaces designed with accessibility, physical and mental health, visual impact and beauty in mind are the norm in creating the beautiful and vibrant towns and cities of tomorrow.

Our target

Our aspirational target is to see a doubling of native woodland cover over the next 50 years from 1,200,000 to 2,400,000 hectares; this signifies the scale of our ambition and vision to see the UK as a country more richly endowed with native woods and forests in the future. As a first step towards this we have developed an evidence based rationale for a minimum of 400,000 hectares which would go a long way to putting woodland wildlife

on a more sustainable footing for the future^{xv} and ensure that everyone was able to access a small wood (min 2ha) close to their home (500m) and a larger wood (20ha) within 4km of their home.^{xvi} Although this target is twice as challenging as that set out in the UKBAP, we feel that there are many other valid environmental and social reasons for planting native woodland.

To get there we call for the following action:

- Commitment from Governments to create or amend targets for increased woodland cover which must then drive increased rates of native planting across all of the UK to 20,000 hectares per annum, more than double current rates of native woodland planting.
- The location of new native woodland to be targeted carefully so as to make best use of available resources. Targeting should focus especially on three kinds of locations: areas of high concentrations of ancient woods and other semi-natural habitats so as to protect, buffer and extend them, the uplands in general, and areas close to where people live where no accessible woodland or other greenspace exists.
- An opportunity for every child in the UK to plant trees in his or her local community so that they have a life changing experience through direct contact with nature
- More national regional and local government support for woodland creation which links public money with delivery of the full suite of public benefits of new native woodland creation
- Native woodland creation having a greater priority within forestry planning policy in particular and land use in general.

What the Woodland Trust already does and will do more of

- Target our woodland creation activities to buffer and extend ancient woods, to provide quiet spaces for people to enjoy close to where they live and to enrich the woods and forests of the uplands.
- Selectively acquire land for woodland creation ourselves as exemplars e.g. land at Sandridge
- Work in partnership with others to persuade them to create new woods
- In certain circumstances provide direct advice and practical help in delivery of tree planting on others land and make it as easy as possible for others to do so
- Use the act of tree planting as a rallying point for public engagement in our work

- Inspire and enthuse our members, supporters and the public about the value of woodland creation in our communications
- Lobby Governments in all four countries to take native woodland creation seriously
- Set ourselves a challenging target of delivering 1000ha of new woodland creation per annum
- Use the great interest of our corporate partners in offsetting their carbon emissions to create new woods for wider benefit too.
- Develop an even stronger evidence base for the benefits of woodland creation

ⁱ Native means woodland comprising species generally considered to be native to England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland; most are broadleaved but some are conifers.

ⁱⁱ Forestry Commission (2003) National Inventory of Woodland and Trees; England 8.4%, Wales 13.8%, Scotland 16.4%; Northern Ireland 6.4%)

ⁱⁱⁱ Forestry Commission (2007) Forestry Facts and Figures www.forestry.gov.uk

^{iv} Most but not all broadleaved planting consist of native species. By contrast most conifer planting is of non native species though the exceptions are Scots pine and juniper which are native conifers.

^v Forestry Commission Forestry Statistics 2007 www.forestry.gov.uk New Scots pine forests form part of the coniferous planting figures but are nonetheless new native woods.

^{vi} Scottish Forestry Strategy (2005), Northern Ireland Forest Strategy (2006) , England Strategy for Trees Woods and Forests (2007), Wales Woodland Strategy (2001)

^{vii} The term woodland creation includes both planting and natural regeneration.

^{viii} FC 2007 Public opinion of Forestry www.forestry.gov.uk

^{ix} Pretty J, Griffin M, Peacock J, Hine R, Sellens M and South N. 2005. A Countryside for Health and Well-Being: *The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise*. Countryside Recreation Network, Sheffield

^x Ulrich, Simons, Losito, Fiorito, Miles and Zelson (1991), Stress recovery during exposure to natural and urban environments, *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 11, 201-230.

^{xi} Woodland Trust 2004 Space for People

^{xii} K.G Willis et al (2003) the social and environmental benefits of Forests in Great Britain Report to the FC

^{xiii} Woodland Trust (2008) Woodland actions for biodiversity and their role in water management

^{xiv} Woodland Trust (2007) Position Statement, 'Trees and their role in carbon management for land and business'; <http://thor/sites/wt/policypa/Lists/WT%20Policies%20and%20Position%20Statements/Attachments/100/CARBON%20POSITION%20STATEMENT%20FEB%202007.pdf>

^{xv} Woodland Trust (2002) Space for Nature

^{xvi} Woodland Trust (2005) Space for People