



FAQ Questions – the Woodland Trust and the NPPF

What is the Draft NPPF?

The draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will form the basis of the planning system in England (planning powers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for their assemblies). It replaces all the existing national planning policy statements and guidance; for example Planning Policy Statement 9: *Biodiversity and Geological Conservation*.

The current draft is being consulted on until 17 October 2011. The Woodland Trust will be submitting a full response and we are encouraging our members and supporters to respond highlighting the need to ensure that the planning system both protects our most valuable natural habitats like ancient woodland and encourages new tree planting.

Surely streamlining the planning system makes sense?

The Woodland Trust supports the principle of making the planning system more straightforward, transparent and accountable. Any reforms should increase the protection given to ancient woods and trees. Such an action would also help to deliver on the welcome commitments in the Natural Environment White Paper to ensure that ancient woodland is adequately protected.

The Department of Communities and Local Government have claimed that they are cutting down 1000 pages of planning guidance into a concise National Planning Policy Framework. However this comes within days of the Department of Energy and Climate Change producing over 600 pages of guidance on National Policy Statements for Energy Infrastructure. This appears to be out of kilter when the NPPF, the proposed planning policy for most developments in the country, is only 58 pages long.

Why is the Trust interested in the planning system?

The planning system is one of the mechanisms through which ancient woods and trees can be protected. Through our team of WoodWatch volunteers we contest planning applications that threaten to damage or destroy ancient woodland. At the minute we are fighting planning applications that threaten 452 ancient woodlands. The changes to the planning system being proposed will impact on our ability to protect ancient woodland.

For further details please contact
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Protection for ancient woodland is remaining the same – so what’s the fuss about?

The wording that protects ancient woodland and trees in the NPPF has been directly lifted from Planning Policy Statement 9. But the draft NPPF is a totally different document as it is primarily focussed on growth – delivering on economic objectives appears to be the overriding aim of the NPPF. If the NPPF is read as a whole – as is suggested throughout the document – then the protection for ancient woodland may in fact be less than was enjoyed previously. In essence, we cannot rely on one paragraph alone to deliver the protection of our ancient woodland and trees.

Are you against economic growth?

The Woodland Trust is not anti-growth. We believe that economic gain should not be at the expense of the natural environment. Ancient woodland can take thousands of years to evolve, is our equivalent of the rainforest and should therefore be given adequate protection.

The Trust also believes that tree planting can make a significant contribution in enhancing a local environment and thereby providing attractive locations for businesses and communities. High quality environments cannot be achieved with a planning system that assumes a default ‘yes’ position to all development. Planning should aim to integrate high quality planting and landscaping within the built environment.

I heard it will help local communities get involved in planning?

The powers set out in the Localism Bill will enable communities to draw up their own Neighbourhood Plans providing that they are in conformity with the NPPF. This is a very welcome opportunity for local people to become involved in planning. The Trust will be producing guidance on how to engage with neighbourhood plans in order to protect woods and plant more trees.

How is the Trust responding?

We will continue to analyse the draft NPPF and engage with the Department of Communities and Local Government to highlight our concerns. In the coming months we will also be launching an online campaign giving the public an opportunity to champion woods and trees.

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