

Growing the future:

**The Woodland Trust's
six priorities for the
2017 UK Parliament**



**WOODLAND
TRUST**

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1 Securing the benefits of current environmental legislation

The UK's cherished landscapes, wildlife and natural environment enjoy a degree of protection from a range of regulations and legislation, much of which derives from the EU. We must fully transpose and maintain existing EU environmental laws and principles into UK law and ensure we have the necessary governance arrangements in place for robust implementation and enforcement. Any changes should be subject to thorough parliamentary scrutiny.

2 Real protection for our irreplaceable ancient woodland habitats

Known failings in key areas of existing domestic environmental protection must be properly addressed too. The importance of irreplaceable ancient woodland habitats is recognised in national policy but not effectively protected in all circumstances. In England, the Housing White Paper of February 2017 begins to address the issue of better protection for ancient woodland and veteran trees but doesn't go far enough in terms of offering protection that will carry sufficient legal weight. Paragraph 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) needs to be amended so the loss of ancient woods and trees becomes "wholly exceptional" – giving them the same protection as the most important features of our built heritage.

This reflects the growing recognition across the political spectrum of the importance of ancient woods as 'nature's cathedrals' given their cultural and natural heritage

significance, and that present rates of loss are incompatible with ambitions to leave the environment in a better state for future generations. This must be accompanied by an approach to major infrastructure projects that genuinely seeks to avoid irreplaceable habitats and demonstrates learning from mistakes made in relation to Phase 1 of High Speed 2.

3 Environmental security through a new land use policy

Today, our trees, forests and woodland habitats face a perfect storm of climate change, pests and diseases, and the constant attrition of loss and damage from development, over-grazing and intensive land use.

Leaving the EU provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape a new UK land use policy, with trees and woods far more to the fore. This new approach should be realised through a strong 25-year plan and subsequent legislation which recognise the multi-tiered benefits trees and woods provide and the contribution they can make as an integral part of farming systems.

The impact of these benefits will be felt across the country in flood alleviation, carbon sequestration, improved air quality, increased biodiversity, timber production, rural business, tourism, access and sustainable agriculture.

A genuine commitment to leaving the environment in a better state than we found it requires a bold and visionary implementation of the recommendations of the Natural Capital Committee.

4 Trees for people at the heart of an environment that works for everyone

The Natural Capital Committee estimates that the creation of 250,000 hectares of woodland near to towns and cities could generate societal benefits in excess of £500m a year. This ambition should be at the forefront of government plans to enhance the environment and boost nature's recovery, providing opportunities for everyone to experience nature, irrespective of their wealth or background.

Action is also required to secure the future of the Public Forest Estate. Long term public benefit should be at the heart of revised governance and legal arrangements.

A renewed focus on the restoration of ancient woodland sites planted with conifers should be a priority for the Public Forest Estate that helps showcase best practice to other landowners too.

5 Work to accelerate planting rates

Planting rates for new woodland have continued to decline under successive governments, with figures for 2015/16 amongst the lowest on record. In England,

just 700 hectares were planted that year, against a Government aspiration of 5,000 hectares per annum. This failure was highlighted in the 2017 EFRA select committee report Seeing the Woods for the Trees. It must spur a more ambitious approach that is not shy of setting targets, that tackles administrative complexities and harnesses innovative sources of funding in order to capture the imagination of landowners and the public alike.

The new Government must look afresh at the interplay between trees, woods, forestry and farming and make it far easier for landowners to integrate tree planting into their wider land use plans.

6 Green infrastructure should be integral to new development

The numerous public health and economic benefits of green space, in particular woods and trees, are well documented. In the drive to build houses and secure growth, governments must harness the huge benefits new woods and trees provide in shaping communities where people of all backgrounds will want to live and work, while also protecting existing valued assets such as ancient woodland.





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