

Position Statement

Ancient and veteran trees, parkland and wood pasture

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WOODLAND
TRUST



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The Trust's view:

- Ancient and veteran trees, and trees with particular historic or cultural significance, are often referred to as Trees of Special Interest (TSI). All such trees should be valued, protected and conserved especially where they are in significant clusters or concentrations in priority habitats such as wood pasture and parkland, woodland, commons, traditional orchards, historic hedges, old pollards on river banks and in historic landscapes.
- A succession of trees are needed to become the TSIs of the future especially as part of restoring, creating, buffering and extending parkland and wood pasture and other priority habitats or historic landscapes. Natural regeneration should be encouraged as well as planting.
- Pollard management is a simple, traditional and sustainable way to provide multiple ecosystem benefits from trees especially in areas where land is in short supply.
- We would like to see farming and forestry practices that recognise and protect TSIs, land management practices that incorporate management of TSIs in their long term interest, and increasing progress in communities recognising the value of their TSIs and better protecting them.

The Trust will:

- Encourage governments and their agencies to provide advice and grants to help tree owners care for their TSIs appropriately
- Encourage local authorities in England and Wales to exercise their duties and powers under Tree Preservation Order and Conservation Area legislation to the full to protect important TSIs at risk.
- Work in partnership with the Tree Register of the British Isles to build and maintain an on-line database and map of recorded ancient, veteran and notable trees. Share this data with others to help conserve TSIs
- Take action and work with communities to fight threats to important collections of TSIs or particular iconic trees and provide the facility for communities to add tree records.
- Analyse and promote the ancient tree database to identify landscapes richest in TSIs as a priority for conservation and to assist others with appropriate conservation planning and designation.
- Press for better protection for TSIs in legislation and policy and for incentives to support sensitive management and restoration of concentrations of such trees especially in wood pasture and parkland.
- Work in partnership with the Ancient Tree Forum and other stakeholders to provide demonstrations, best practice advice and training on the recognition and care of TSIs – include development of areas of parkland and wood pasture where appropriate on our own estate.
- Lobby for better recording of wood pasture and parkland habitats to allow them to be considered alongside ancient woodland and other priority habitats.

Background

Trees of special interest (TSIs) are often the most valuable trees in the UK landscape: comprising champion, ancient, veteran, notable, rare and other heritage trees. In addition to providing all the ecosystem benefits of younger trees, TSIs have special qualities such as size, age, rarity or condition that contribute additional biodiversity, cultural, historic or aesthetic values to the landscape. Historic landscapes containing collections of TSIs can provide valuable tourism benefits associated with old growth habitats and often possess unique heritage and cultural significance at local, national and international levels.

Ancient trees are a rarity in themselves and represent a scarce and unique habitat with its own characteristic biodiversity. The UK is thought to contain the highest proportion of ancient trees in Northern Europe.

TSIs are often a legacy of the past. The most ancient, such as yews, are associated with ancient religious practices, particularly burial, but ancient yews are also found in the wild on limestone cliff faces or in association with beech woodland. Many collections of TSIs are associated with surviving remnants of mediaeval Royal Hunting Forests and deer parks. Pollard landscapes including orchards and old hedgerows were working landscapes which until recent times provided fodder, fuel, fruits and flowers for everyday living. Different species of tree were cut to different forms depending on the product required: hollies for fodder, boundary ash pollards for fodder and fuel, oak, beech and hornbeam largely for fuel or seed production.

As trees age the habitats they provide change. The pH of the bark changes providing conditions for a specialist set of lichens and mosses. The trunk and main branches on ageing start to hollow through decay by rare or specialised fungi - creating conditions in which rare invertebrates thrive. Hollows, crevices and flaking bark provide roosting and nesting places for birds, bats and reptiles. The root systems also change over time with different and often rare fungi colonising the root tips. The species found with ancient and veteran trees are those associated with old growth trees and forests – one of the rarest and most historic habitats in Europe.

Lack of appropriate tree surveys and the absence of a priority wood pasture and parkland habitat inventory has inhibited the development of conservation priorities for these remarkable trees and characteristic habitats. The Ancient Tree Database, which now contains over 100,000 individual tree records, forms the basis for important and ongoing work that has identified important concentrations of trees which hitherto have been undervalued.

The Woodland Trust believes such old growth areas that are rich in ancient and other TSIs should be protected and conserved. A young tree can only replace an ancient tree over a period of hundreds of years, this 'overlap' of generations is essential as an ancient tree's important relict features and associated wildlife cannot return once lost. Protection of priority TSI habitat is vital if the trees and their associated wildlife and historic values are to be carried forwards into the future.

We would like to see farming practices that protect TSIs, especially their sensitive bark and root systems from livestock damage, cultivation impact, compaction, or agricultural chemicals by, for example, establishing root protection areas and reducing inputs nearby. We would also like to see forestry practices that protect TSIs: by protecting root systems from compaction during forestry operations, creating space or 'halos' around individual trees to allow more open crowns and removing shade and competition from encroaching non-native evergreens, and through better planning for future generations of open crowned ancient trees.

We support appropriate management interventions where it is in the long term interest of individual trees (to avoid catastrophic collapse) or to minimise risk of harm to people and property.

We encourage communities to recognise the value of TSIs and protect them from damage or loss in the urban environment, e.g. by identifying them and working with their local authority to include them in local plans.

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