

AN ACCORD
BETWEEN THE ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITIES
AND THE FORESTRY COMMISSION



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Purpose

The purpose of this Accord is to provide a framework for the two organisations to work together to enhance the contribution that trees and woodlands can make to society within some of the finest landscapes in England and Wales.

By working together with a common set of goals we can jointly deliver sustainable improvements in the environment and the local economy, and also enhance the quality of life of people who live in, or visit, National Parks.

This Accord provides the national umbrella for the development of local accords, which reflect the distinctive nature of each National Park, identifying the opportunities for working together at a local level.

Developing the partnership

For many years the National Parks and the Forestry Commission have worked together on both the creation and management of woodlands. In 1993 the Association of National Park Authorities and the Forestry Commission signed an Agreement on Native Woodlands in National Parks, and this has led to some notable success in expanding and improving the condition of these important features.



This renewed Accord will build on this success, widening the scope and depth of this partnership.

There have been many recent developments which alter the context for the Accord, including:

- devolution and the development of the Country Woodland Strategies;
- the CRow Act 2000;
- the fundamental changes in agriculture, and crisis in livestock farming in the uplands;
- the 2002 review of National Parks in England.

The need to recognise the role of woodlands in sustaining rural communities is a common thread in these, and is an area where an enhanced partnership is needed.



OUR SHARED OBJECTIVES

There is much common ground in the aims, policies and purposes of National Parks and the Forestry Commission.

The 'statutory purposes' of National Parks, as stated in the Environment Act (1995, Section 61) are:

- (a) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the National Parks; and
- (b) to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities (of the Parks) by the public.

There is also a duty on the National Park Authorities, specified in Section 62 of the Act, 'to seek to foster the economic and social well being of their local communities'.

The Act also places a duty on all Government departments and other public bodies, which includes the Forestry Commission and Forest Enterprise, 'to have regard to the purposes of National Parks in the exercise of their own functions affecting land in a National Park'.

Both England and Wales have developed Forestry Strategies which express the priorities for woodland and forestry in each country, and include programmes of action.

The **England Forestry Strategy** was published in 1998, and three of the four programmes include actions which are particularly relevant to National Parks:

- **Rural Development:** provide support for marketing initiatives and woodland businesses; research the role of forestry, and woodland-based tourism, in the rural economy
- **Recreation, Access and Tourism:** increase access to woodland and provide better information; improve recreational facilities; and promote better understanding of woodland
- **Environment and Conservation:** protect existing woodland; promote the environmental benefits of woodland; and seek to reverse the fragmentation of native woodland.

Woodland for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government's Strategy for Trees and Woodlands, states that: 'Woodlands are a renewable resource, which can generate a positive image for Wales which can contribute to the aims for a successful economy, a better environment and healthy communities adding to the overall quality of life'. In particular, the Strategy aims:

- to provide opportunities for communities to have their say in the management of woodlands close to where they live;
- to convert 50% of the Assembly woodlands to continuous cover and to encourage the use of this practice elsewhere;
- to implement the biodiversity action plan targets for native woodland;
- to promote woodland's contribution to a high-quality visitor experience;
- to integrate woodland planning and management with the rural economic and social programmes of the Assembly.

OUR SHARED PRIORITIES

We have identified the following priorities for enhancing the role of woodlands in National Parks:

Conserve and enhance the landscapes and cultural heritage by:

- diversifying, restructuring and where appropriate removing unsuitable existing plantations;
- ensuring that any new woodlands enhance the distinctive landscape character;
- conserving the cultural associations and historic value of woodlands and archaeological sites within plantations.

Conserve wildlife and deliver the UK Biodiversity Action Plan by:

- supporting the appropriate restoration of semi-natural habitats from non-native plantation woodlands, including ancient woodland sites;
- developing mechanisms that support the improvement in ecological condition of native woodlands in National Parks;
- creating woodland and habitat networks that buffer and expand areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland;
- enabling removal of plantations in situations where there is a greater potential for biodiversity through restoration to open-ground habitats.

Improve recreation opportunities and local people's quality of life by:

- promoting diverse recreational uses of woodlands, with provision for people of all abilities;
- creating new opportunities for 'dedicated' and informal woodland access for all;
- providing assistance and support to those improving the quality of woodland access;
- stimulating innovative projects which will enhance local quality of life and demonstrate sustainability (as promoted via the Environment and Sustainable Development Funds).

Promote the role of woodlands in sustainable rural development by:

- promoting sustainable tourism and the contribution of woodlands to diversifying and enhancing the experience of visitors to the Parks;
- seeking to develop new markets for timber and other products from sustainably managed woodland;
- maximising the marketing opportunities of sustainable forest certification, quality assurance and local branding;
- stimulating and assisting new woodland-based enterprises, especially those related to non-timber benefits;
- investigating the wider function of woodlands for environmental protection and society, such as their potential in the reduction of flood risk.

THE ROLE OF WOODLAND IN NATIONAL PARKS

Trees, woodland and forestry play a major role in National Parks, in a diverse range of ways, and there is great potential to enhance this role, albeit with some challenges:

Landscape

Woodlands are a prominent and much-valued feature of the National Park landscapes, and adding some native woodland to some deforested landscapes is a priority in many areas. Great advances have been made in the last decade restructuring plantations to ensure that they make a positive contribution to the landscape. There is now scope for more radical change as some intrusive conifer plantations reach maturity, through either conversion to native woodland or restoration to other habitats.



Cultural heritage

Woodlands are the result of a complex interaction of natural processes and a long history of use by man. Ancient woodland is one of the oldest features of National Park landscapes. The more recent plantations also contain many archaeological features, and many earthworks, standing stones and other historic features are being revealed through the restructuring process.



Biodiversity

The native and ancient woodlands are some of the richest habitats for wildlife in National Parks. However, they are typically fragmented and neglected, with many also under threat from over-grazing by livestock or deer. New native woodland can buffer existing ancient woodland, and can also contribute to the development of 'habitat networks'. However, it is vital that any woodland creation is not done at the expense of existing valuable open habitats. The diversification of the conifer forests is increasing their value for wildlife, and enhancing the non-woodland habitats within them.



Recreation and quality of life

Both woodlands and forests provide excellent recreation opportunities within National Parks, complementing the wide open landscapes which dominate most National Parks. They are excellent at absorbing large numbers of people and higher-impact recreational activities and facilities. There is still a need for more woodland open for public access, and the dedication of land under the CRoW Act provides a new mechanism. There is also a need for better information on access and recreational opportunities and further improvements to the quality of the recreational experience.



Rural development

Woodland-based recreation or tourism enterprises are a substantial and increasing source of local employment. The timber industry is going through difficult times, but there is potential for high value-added wood products, utilising both 'sustainable' and 'local' brand marketing opportunities. Retaining 'economic wealth' within Parks is now recognised as a priority, and this can often be achieved by integrating woodland enterprises with other complementary businesses.



IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS – AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

The Association of National Park Authorities and the Forestry Commission will work together in partnership at a country and local level to deliver our shared objectives.

The critical step between this National Accord and action on the ground will be **local accords** or **joint action plans** agreed between each National Park and relevant Forestry Commission Conservancy. In some cases these already exist, and simply need updating, but in others they will need to be developed anew. They will set out the specific joint actions appropriate for each Park, and reflect their distinctive needs and individual character.

The LOCAL accords will include the following actions:

- Develop policies and initiatives to deliver our shared priorities
- Share information of mutual interest and develop networks between relevant colleagues
- Disseminate good practice and achievements within the Parks, and also seek to use the Parks as exemplars of sustainability for the wider countryside
- Pool resources and collaborate to secure external funding
- Engage with other partners to improve delivery of shared aims
- Involve local communities in development and delivery
- Hold annual meetings between Conservators, National Park Officers and other appropriate staff to review progress with local accords
- Develop or adopt appropriate indicators, consistent with other national and local measures, and periodically report on progress in each Park

This local implementation will be complemented by the following actions at a NATIONAL level:

- Establish country-based mechanisms to co-ordinate the implementation of this Accord and exchange of experience between England and Wales
- Jointly sponsor a National Conference to review the outcomes of this Accord, share success with a wider audience and provide a platform to explore new issues
- Improve the availability of information and data on woodlands within National Parks



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