

Forestry Commission and Natural England consultation exercise
on:

The potential for woodland creation in England

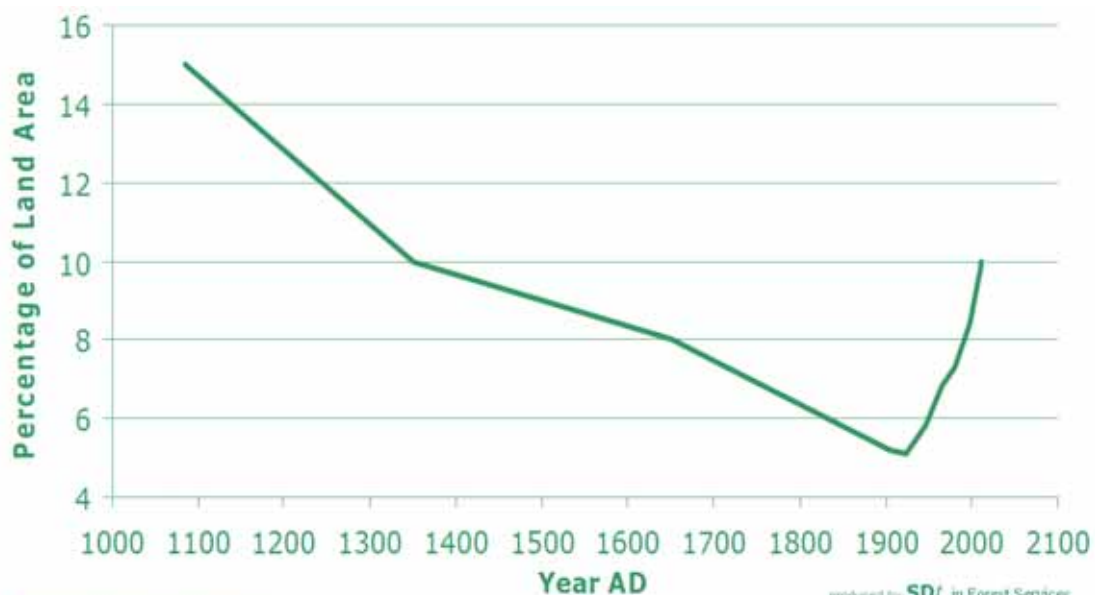
Summary

The Forestry Commission and Natural England would like your views on the potential for woodland creation in the landscapes that you know. This will help us to identify where the opportunities are to help meet Government aspirations for more woodland.

We have devised a web-based tool - the Woodland Potential Calculator - which will present information on woodland, forestry, landscape, land use and the natural environment (by Natural Character Area) and show on a map existing land cover and land quality. This will provide context for your discussions locally on the level of woodland creation that could be accommodated in different places. Your own place-based knowledge about the benefits (environmental, social and economic) that new woodland might bring to an area will be very important.

1. Background

At the beginning of the twentieth century, woodland cover in England was at an all time low, having been reduced by human activities over the previous millennium. During the past 90 years, this loss of woodland has been partly reversed, with cover doubling from 5% to 10%.



Woodland as a percentage of land area in England.

The [Natural Environment White Paper](#)¹ indicated Government's desire for woodland cover to increase further over the next 50 years by creating more opportunities:

- for new forests and native woodlands that provide timber and a wide range of other goods and services including wildlife and landscape enhancement, recreation opportunities and water quality improvement;
- for more trees in our towns, cities and villages;
- to increase the use of sustainably grown and harvested wood products;
- to increase resilience to climate change and pests and diseases, and;
- to help to halt the loss of biodiversity.

The Natural Environment White Paper also reiterated the request to the [Independent Panel on Forestry](#)² to advise on an appropriate level of woodland expansion in England. Their report, published on 4th July recommended that woodland – in its many forms including large conifer forests, native woodland, copses on farms and urban/hedgerow/riverbank trees – is increased from 10 to 15%.

2. Your views

To deliver the aspirations for woodland expansion would mean a sizeable change in land-use, raising the question 'where will the woodland be planted?' The Northwest Regional Forestry Forum addressed this challenging question, in developing their forestry manifesto 'Our Future Canopy'³, through a series of meetings with organisations representing all rural land use interests. This stakeholder-led analysis concluded that close to a doubling of woodland cover in the Northwest of England was desirable to deliver a range of goods and services for society and wildlife. Using a similar process, we would now like your views on the desirable level of future woodland cover in your area and, through collating all responses, for England as a whole.

In particular, we are seeking your views on:

- What level of woodland cover is desirable and achievable in particular places?
- What types of land should woodland be created on?
- What types of woodland would be appropriate, and for which purposes?

¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>

² <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/>

³ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/OurFutureCanopy.pdf/\\$FILE/OurFutureCanopy.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/OurFutureCanopy.pdf/$FILE/OurFutureCanopy.pdf)

To inform this decision making process, we are asking for comments on 'woodland creation potential' for each of Natural England's [National Character Areas](#)⁴. This will help to capture the views of local people and allow communities to inform us about us local character and the features which they value most within their landscape.

For each of these areas of defined landscape character, we have provided a preliminary figure for woodland creation that reflects a 'national up-scaling' of the analysis undertaken in the Northwest of England. In that analysis, it was concluded that as an average across the region as a whole, the percentage of total land area in each land category, as given in the table below, could be appropriate for woodland creation.

Land category	National default Woodland expansion potential (% of total land area in each category)
Statutory sensitive sites	7.0
Urban	4.6
Prime agricultural land (ALC1-3a)	1.0
Moderate agricultural land (ALC3b)	4.5
Other rural land (ALC4&5)	7.9

It should be stressed that these figures do not represent targets and are not binding - it will be up to land owners to decide whether to plant woodland, based on the economic and environmental benefits it provides in different situations. Rather, they should be seen as the view – at the current time – of the ability of the different land categories to absorb more woodland and we are asking you to refine these national, 'broad-brush' figures for each NCA; **it is not an exact science and the 'judgement' of local people that know individual NCAs is what we are keen to hear.**

Since the figures are based on an analysis undertaken in the Northwest, they may not reflect opportunities for woodland creation across the whole of England; in particular, opportunities for woodland creation on 'Statutory Sensitive Sites' (including protected landscapes) may not be replicated elsewhere, while 'moderate agricultural land' may have greater potential for woodland planting outside the Northwest.

Existing regulations that manage land use change – specifically the Environmental Impact (Forestry) regulations – will continue to apply. For all areas of woodland creation greater than five hectares (two hectares in 'protected areas'), these regulations require the Forestry Commission, in consultation with other statutory bodies, to publish a decision on whether an Environmental Statement or full Environmental Impact Assessment is required. In both cases, extensive expert and local stakeholder consultation would then follow.

⁴ <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/nca/>

3. Issues you might consider when responding

When responding to this 'call for views' you are asked to consider the **long term** potential for woodland creation – over the next 50 years.

We also ask you to consider the **reasons for planting new woodland**; it may be for timber or for woodfuel production to meet renewable energy targets⁵, to protect our water or soil resources⁶ or to provide new habitat for wildlife⁷. Its purpose may determine what **type of woodland** should be planted and we would like to hear your views on this aspect. It may also point to **where in the NCA or which site types** should be the priorities for woodland creation – or where woodland should **not be planted**; we would also like to hear your views on these aspects.

Finally, when considering your response, we ask you not to be constrained by current socio-economic circumstances. Instead, we ask you to consider the following longer terms trends and scenarios:

- Timber and woodfuel are likely to be increasingly sought after commodities and this is likely to be reflected in their value;
- There will be a larger human population – both globally and in the UK – requiring more timber, more food, and more of the other services that forests provide like water filtration and places for recreation and 'escape';
- The level of Government incentives for agriculture may change;
- Carbon may become an increasingly 'hard' currency, making forest carbon projects more attractive;
- Productive landscapes that promote biodiversity and deliver multiple objectives will be increasingly welcome; woodland is one of a number of important habitats;
- Agricultural land suitability/fertility may decline in some areas and become more suitable for forestry.

4. Woodland Potential Calculator

Description

The Woodland Potential Calculator has been developed to present information at National Character Area level to inform discussion, debate and the formulation of views on an appropriate level of woodland creation. It can be downloaded from <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/inf-d-8yhjz1> and includes detailed instructions which can be accessed using the F1 key.

The front page gives a national overview, including land quality as 'landscape zone' and the area of existing woodland. 'Statutory sensitive

⁵ See Bioenergy Strategy: http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/meeting_energy/bioenergy/strategy/

⁶ See Woodlands for Water Report: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/woodlandforwater/>

⁷ See Biodiversity 2020: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/08/19/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020/>

sites' are those areas covered by designations, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, registered parks and gardens and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The 'achievable uplift' column presents the preliminary woodland creation figures for each 'landscape zone' based on a national 'up-scaling' of the stakeholder-led analysis from Northwest England. This is presented as the % of land area of each land quality category that, if added to the existing woodland area, would result in the total woodland area (% or hectares given in the final column 'Target woodland').

By clicking on the map, the same summary information is presented for individual NCAs and the 'achievable uplift' column can be edited by pressing the return key and then clicking on the relevant Landscape zone.

The key characteristics of the NCA are available by selecting the 'description' tab, the key characteristics will be replaced by the summary description from the NCA profiles as they are published between now and April 2013.

Contextual information on forestry and woodlands and wider land use information can be accessed by selecting the 'Information' and 'Forestry' tabs. As explained in more detail below, this information has been collated to help identify significant drivers and opportunities for, or barriers to, woodland creation.

Contextual land use information

Land will become an increasingly sought after resource, and it is important to consider the future purpose of new woodland. The information presented will help inform these views, for example by identifying where current land use presents a threat to the freshwater environment and the ability to achieve Water framework Directive objectives. Information is also presented to identify where existing land use/quality (e.g. the extent of priority open habitats or high quality agricultural land) will limit (but not necessarily prevent) woodland creation aspirations.

Contextual forestry information

Information on forestry provides an indication of economic activity relevant to the forestry sector in each NCA (both woodfuel and conventional wood processing), the nature of the woodland resource, gains and losses in woodland area over the past few decades and an indication of current and future productivity of key forestry species (both conifer and broadleaf).

5. Interpreting the information presented

A large body of contextual information is presented through the Woodland Potential Calculator. Additional relevant information may also be available through Local Authorities, Natural England, the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission Area Offices, Wildlife Trusts and non-Government organisations.

Some pointers to how this information might be interpreted are provided below:

Designated sites: whether these are European (e.g. SPAs, SACs), national (e.g. SSSIs, AONBs, National Parks) or local (e.g. Local Nature Reserves), these will constrain woodland creation and, in particular, the nature of the woodland planted. However, in many cases, there will be scope for some woodland or scrub creation to enhance existing designated features.

Extent of peatland: As outlined in the UK Forestry Standard, woodland creation is not an option on peat of more than 50 cm depth – or on shallower peaty soils which support priority habitats like wet heath.

Extent of erosion prone soils: Woodland can play an important role in reducing soil erosion, through windbreaks reducing windspeed, and wider landscape planting reducing soil erosion in run-off.

Water bodies at risk or failing WFD objectives (including Nitrate Vulnerable Zones): Small scale targeted woodland creation and wider landscape planting can reduce pesticide, nitrate, phosphate and sediment pollution.

Groundwater resource: Some ground water bodies are already in supply deficit, a situation that is likely to worsen with climate change. Extensive conifer and energy forest planting, which use more water than other land uses, are likely to be considered inappropriate. Broadleaf woodland uses a similar amount of water to pasture.

Proportion of NCA in EA flood zone: Floodplain woodland and wider landscape planting can help in catchment management to alleviate flooding.

Land use: Large scale planting is unlikely to prove economically attractive in areas dominated by arable and cash/root crops (although smaller scale planting may be helpful in meeting WFD objectives). In some areas, woodland planting on livestock (including dairy) farms may be attractive.

Farm size: Large farms may have more capacity for woodland creation, particularly on poorer quality land.

Owner occupancy: Woodland planting is more likely on owner-occupied farms than on tenanted farms.

Livestock: Sheep farming, in particular, can be economically marginal and woodland creation may be an attractive method of diversification on some farms.

Environmental Stewardship: The extent of Higher Level Scheme uptake may indicate where woodland planting for environmental diversification might prove attractive.

Biodiversity Action Plan priority open habitat extent: Woodland planting on most priority BAP open habitats is likely to be severely constrained, or of small scale to meet other environmental objectives such as water management. However, large extents of some habitats (e.g. upland acid grassland) may provide significant potential for woodland planting.

Historic assets: Extensive historic assets indicate that greater care may be needed to accommodate woodland in the landscape and protect buried archaeology.

Access: Large populations with limited areas of accessible land and rights of way may benefit from woodland planting if access is granted at planting. New woodland may also provide a future recreational resource.

Woodfuel boilers and forestry businesses: An indication of current economic activity in the sector highlighting future market opportunities for new woodland (including energy forestry in the short to medium term).

Woodland type: May provide a guide to the nature of planting that would be most sympathetic to the landscape character of the NCA. This does not include existing trees along field boundaries or some low density woodlands such as wood pasture and parkland; these types of woodland should, however, be considered as part of woodland creation aspirations.

Ancient woodland: May provide a guide to the nature of planting that would be most sympathetic to the landscape character of the NCA. The extent of plantation on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) may also provide an indication of possible future forest landscape change, as they are restored from conifer to broadleaved species.

Woodland area change: Indicates the extent of land-use and landscape character change (both woodland planting and removal) over the past 75 years, highlighting that landscapes are not static.

Species productivity and extent on the Public Forest Estate: Provides an indication of which key forestry species (both commercial conifer and native broadleaves) have been planted in the past on the basis of their 'suitability'/productivity and are likely to be resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Summary description of landscape character: Indicates whether new woodland planting is likely to be consistent with existing landscape character. As the full NCA profiles are published by Natural England (www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca), information on landscape and woodland change will be available.

6. How to respond

Please respond using the electronic consultation response at:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-wpcresponse>

Alternatively, you can complete the form on page 9 of this document, or a word version of the form available from the web-page given above, which can be posted or scanned and e-mailed to the following address:

WPC response
Forestry Commission
620 Bristol Business park
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol, BS16 1EJ

e-mail: wpcresponse@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

We would be happy to receive views from individuals, membership organisations, civil society organisations and trade bodies. The last date that you can be sure that your views will feed into Government's response to the report of the Independent Panel on Forestry is 31st October 2012. However, the consultation will remain open until 31st December 2012.

We would also be very pleased to receive collated responses (at national or sub-national level) from membership and civil society organisations.

7. Next steps

Stakeholder events

As part of the consultation process, the Forestry Commission, working with Natural England, will host a number of stakeholder workshops. These workshops will be used to present emerging findings on woodland creation potential nationally and in local NCAs. They will also provide a forum for discussion of issues where divergent views are apparent with the intention of reaching a consensus or identifying where further evaluation is required. More information about the workshops will be available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-wpcresponse.

Collation of views

The information presented to us will be collated and summarised at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-wpcresponse. It will also be available to inform Government's response to the Independent Panel of Forestry's report, specifically regarding the recommendation to increase woodland cover in England to 15% by 2060.

Woodland Potential response form		
Are you responding in a personal capacity or on behalf of an organisation?		
If responding on behalf of an organisation, which one?		
Please provide contact details (e-mail or post) if you would like an acknowledgement or to receive details of next steps		
National Character Area for which you are responding (name and/or number)		
Woodland creation potential (achievable uplift)		
	Area (ha)	% of 'landscape zone'
Statutory Sensitive sites		
Urban		
Prime agricultural land (ALC1-3a)		
Moderate agricultural land (ALC3b)		
Other rural land (ALC3&4)		
Note: please provide area or % of 'landscape zone' as achievable uplift; both are not required.		
Please give your views on the type(s) of woodland that would be appropriate for planting within the NCA		
<input type="checkbox"/> Productive conifer <input type="checkbox"/> Native broadleaf <input type="checkbox"/> Energy forestry (SRF) <input type="checkbox"/> Wood pasture <input type="checkbox"/> Street trees <input type="checkbox"/> Hedgerow trees <input type="checkbox"/> Windbreaks		
Please give your views (if applicable) on the reasons for woodland expansion within the NCA		
<input type="checkbox"/> Timber production <input type="checkbox"/> Woodfuel production <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity/habitat creation <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation/access <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape/visual <input type="checkbox"/> Carbon sequestration <input type="checkbox"/> Climate change adaptation <input type="checkbox"/> Water/soil management		
Comments: please provide detailed comments (if applicable) on the reasons for your responses above.		

7. Basic information

Body responsible for seeking views:

Forestry Commission England.

Enquiries

This document is available to read and to download in portable document format (pdf) from www.forestry.gov.uk/england-wpcresponse.

Further information

Further information outlining the sources of information presented in the Woodland Potential Uplift Calculator is available from www.forestry.gov.uk/england-wpc

Alternative formats

If you need this publication in an alternative format, for example in large print or in another language, please contact:

The Diversity Team
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Email: diversity@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

If you want to ask about the content or scope of this document, please contact:

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Coldharbour Lane,
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