

# When to convert woods and forests to open habitat in England

Government  
policy

March 2010

[www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats)

This is a summary of Government policy on how to decide when to convert woodland to open habitat in England.

We, the Forestry Commission, developed this policy working with Defra, Natural England and others.

2-year policy development process working with many stakeholders.

Policy published in March 2010.

Presentation summarises the policy and explains how we are going to make it happen.



The need for Government intervention:

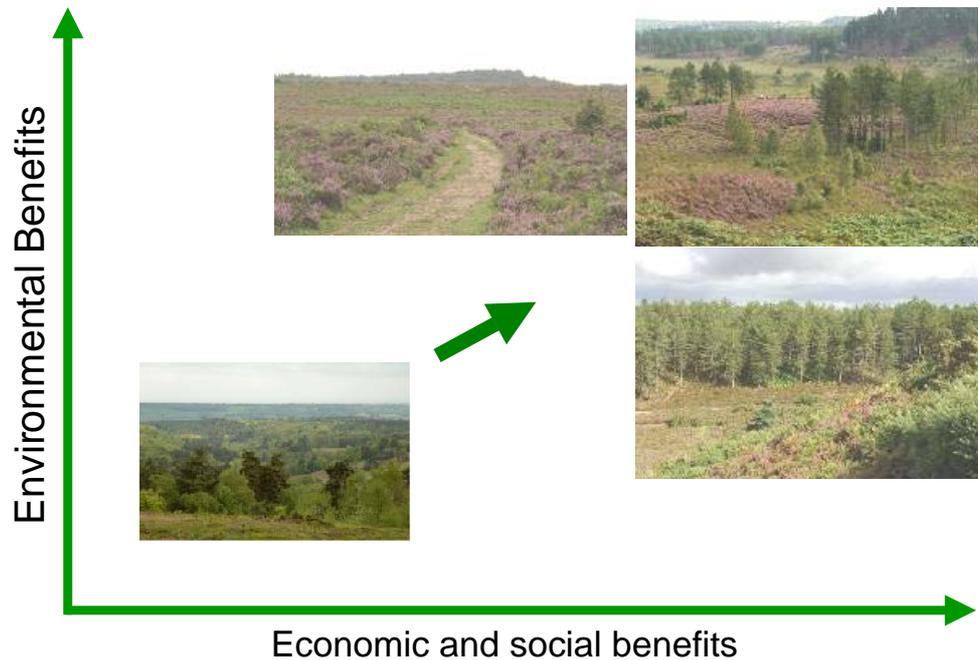
During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century large areas of heathland, moorland, wetland and unimproved grassland were planted with conifers or colonised by birch and pine. We need to continue restoring some of these areas by creating more open habitats to look after species such as the Dorset heath, adder, sand lizard, woodlark, curlew and silver-studded blue butterfly, including helping them cope with climate change.

So this policy is a positive step for biodiversity.

The policy also takes account of the many benefits that woods and forests provide.

Overall, woodland removal will be balanced with increases in the rate of woodland creation to help achieve Government objectives for a low carbon economy and to ensure the area of woodland in England continues to increase.

So this policy is also a positive step for forestry.



Our ambition is to generate landscapes that provide benefits for people and wildlife for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We will achieve this through land-use change using conversion of woodland to open habitat in tandem with woodland creation.

The aims of this policy are to:

- generate biodiverse landscapes of open habitat and woodland that provide long-term benefits to people and wildlife;
- make sure that conversion of woodland results in more open habitat which makes a significant contribution to biodiversity objectives; and
- minimise any negative impacts on the ability of woodland and forestry to increasingly contribute towards a low-carbon economy.



## The outcomes we want



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Open habitats

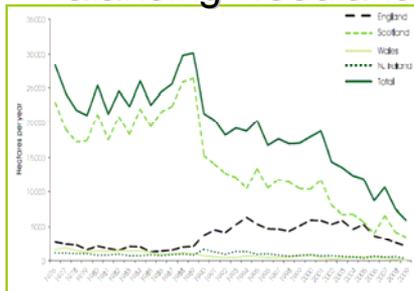
The outcomes we want from the policy are:

- resilient ecological communities, where wildlife, including open habitat species, is able to cope with changes so that biodiversity is maintained and enhanced;
- woodland and forestry that make an increased contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, through higher rates of woodland expansion and by maintaining the area of commercially productive woodland;
- land management which is financially viable in the long-term so that resilient biodiverse landscapes can be maintained and the call on public funding is within manageable limits; and
- people's engagement with the landscape they use, particularly their local landscape, is maintained or enhanced.

Site by site decisions



Balancing woodland removal and creation



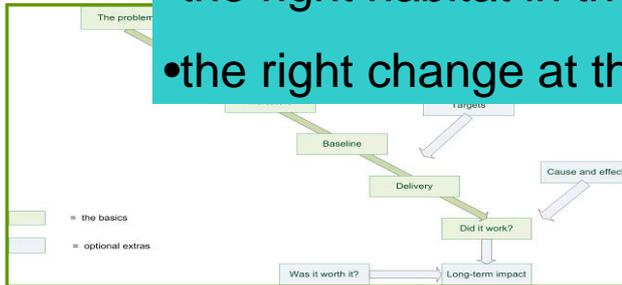
We will deliver this policy using the following elements:

- A framework for site-by-site decision-making based on converting woodland to open habitat where it will consolidate current high quality habitat, or where it will significantly enhance key species and habitats.
- A mechanism for balancing woodland removal and woodland creation based on making reasonable progress on both enhancing open habitats to benefit wildlife and creating woodland to help reduce greenhouse gases.
  - We estimate that the level of ambition for land-use change that represents reasonable progress on both, is a rate of conversion of woodland to open habitat of about 1,000 ha per year, if the rate of woodland expansion also accelerates. An increase in the rate of conversion of woodland to open habitat will therefore start slowly and progress towards 1,000 ha per year with an accelerating rate of woodland expansion.
  - The mechanism will include compensatory planting in certain circumstances, and maintaining the total area of commercially productive woodland, such as conifers.



### Local involvement

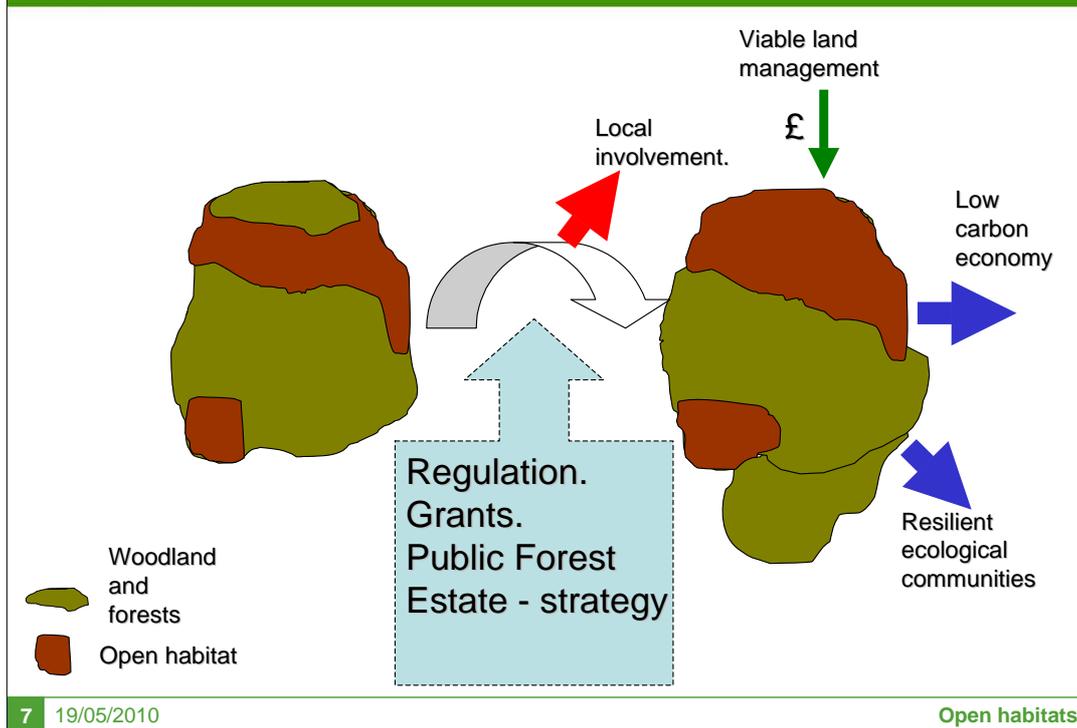
- the right tree in the right place
- the right habitat in the right place
- the right change at the right pace



- Continued. from last slide...
- A process for ensuring local involvement in decision-making from the early stages of any proposals for conversion of woodland to open habitat.
- Standards for conversion and for managing habitats created or woodland retained to:
  - minimise negative impacts on aspects such as landscape, access, and soils;
  - minimise greenhouse gas emissions during conversion (NB: no premature felling except in exceptional circumstances, the picture shows questionable practice for low carbon);
  - make sure woodland is managed so it can still be converted at a later date if needed; and
  - provide information on where to create permanent open habitat, and where more dynamic mosaics of woodland and open habitat are desirable.
- Evaluation of progress towards the outcomes we want. We will do this with our stakeholders. We will assess progress using indicators of outcomes such as the amount of open habitat restored, or expanded, and changes in the area of productive woodland.

To make progress on all these aspects we will apply the following principles:

- the right tree in the right place;
- the right habitat in the right place; and
- the right change at the right pace.



Land-use change: more open habitat, provided rate of woodland creation accelerates.

Deliver the outcomes we want: local involvement, viable land management, resilient ecological communities, contribution to a low carbon economy.

Key delivery mechanisms are regulation (when we support, allow or do not allow woodland removal), grants (when funding is provided for woodland removal and open habitat management), and publicly owned land (how we manage the Forestry Commission Public Forest Estate, and other publicly owned land).

In collaboration with Natural England and working with others, we will evolve the delivery mechanisms available to Government to implement the policy.

We will publish a strategy for open habitats on the Forestry Commission public forest estate. We will publish a strategy for open habitats on the Forestry Commission public forest estate during 2010/11. It will take into account costs, current commitments, conclusions from the study of the long-term role of the estate, and the financial situation.

We will review this policy in 2015.



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Open habitats

This is a complex issue but we believe that we have struck the right balance between meeting Government objectives to maintain and enhance biodiversity and the important role of trees in storing carbon.

The ambition for the policy is to balance land-use change to create landscapes that benefit people and wildlife in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Over the next few months we will be working with Natural England and all our stakeholders to implement the policy. Find out more, get involved.