

Policy Paper

# Emergency Tree Plan for the UK

How to increase tree cover and  
address the nature and climate  
emergency

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WOODLAND  
TRUST

# An Emergency Tree Plan for the UK. How to increase tree cover and address the nature and climate emergency.



Phil Formby/WTMIL

“ In the 2019 General Election every major political party backed the necessary increase in trees and woods in response to the climate and nature crisis. The Government’s climate change advisers have set a target of 17-19% woodland cover as a key part of the UK’s actions to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The decisions we make now about how and where we expand tree cover is an unprecedented opportunity to transform our nation into a better place for people and wildlife. The UK Parliament, devolved administrations and hundreds of local councils have declared a climate emergency. As the UK’s largest woodland conservation charity, this document should challenge and inspire all levels of government – and beyond – to help address the climate and nature emergency through trees and woods. This is an emergency tree plan – where we will play our part, and invite others to join us and our partners in this critical response.

Darren Moorcroft,  
Chief Executive  
The Woodland Trust

[#EmergencyTreePlan](#)



Ian Hinchliffe/Army Stock Photo

## Key recommendations of the Emergency Tree Plan for the UK

National and local governments across the UK must:

### Look after the trees we have.

- Protect and restore existing trees and native woodland.
- Invest in UK tree nurseries now to enable a rapid expansion of UK-grown trees to reduce disease risk of importing trees.
- Improve biosecurity at the border.

### Create new policies, capacity and funding for woods and trees.

- Set new country annual targets on a path to reach 19% UK woodland cover by 2050.
- Combine quantity and quality targets for new tree cover to ensure it stores carbon, supports the recovery of wildlife and benefits people.
- Deliver an emergency increase in capacity in tree and woodland teams at all levels of national and local government.

- Target public money investment in new tree cover to maximise public goods like wildlife.
- Public forest estates and other public land must lead the way in showing how to integrate climate action with nature recovery.
- Grow the nature-based carbon offset market for unavoidable emissions.
- Combine forestry and woodland strategies alongside agriculture in an overall land-use strategy that enables new land for trees as a priority.
- Provide landowners with financial support for the natural regeneration of woodland.

### Take local authority action:

- Each Local Authority to write an **Emergency Tree Plan** to identify land for trees, and set annual expansion targets, whilst protecting existing native woodland and trees.
- Ensure all development land includes a minimum 30% tree canopy cover.

**These recommendations are covered in more detail in section 7.**

# 1. Introduction

The UK is staring down the barrel of twin existential crises; climate change and biodiversity collapse. This country needs to take urgent action to prevent irreversible damage. Woodland expansion on a massive scale will play a huge role in addressing these challenges.

Trees capture carbon and woodlands provide habitats where biodiversity can flourish. The science is unequivocal, but the UK's speed of response needs to accelerate dramatically to prevent irredeemable loss from today's climate emergency.

As the clock ticks, recent reports<sup>1,2</sup>, have issued a series of stark warnings to the world. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that we only have until 2030 to design and implement policies that can limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Every part of the UK is committed to playing its part in reaching a legal target of 'net zero' carbon emissions by 2050. To achieve this extremely challenging goal, the country needs to act immediately.

Its first step should be a major increase in carefully targeted tree cover and the restoration of other habitats, such as peatlands.

The catastrophic collapse in both UK and global<sup>3</sup> biodiversity reinforces the case for a huge expansion in native tree cover and better protection and management of existing woodlands. Over half of the 1,285 woodland species tracked by the UK's State of Nature report are in decline, in particular those which rely on structurally diverse native woodlands<sup>4</sup>. One in 10 of the country's woodland species is in danger of extinction.

The good news is that there is a potential win-win here. The UK can help to tackle both its local biodiversity collapse and the global climate crisis by protecting, restoring and massively expanding its native woodland and tree cover. And well located tree cover can also reduce the risk of flooding; create thousands of new jobs; provide sustainable timber; and of course, make people happier, and healthier.

This will be a challenge, it will cost money, and it will involve tough choices, but the UK is standing at an environmental crossroads.

This short report explains the best strategy to address the climate emergency through trees and woods, and how to extract maximum benefits from this strategy for both nature and people.

This is an emergency tree plan for the nation.

## Woodland's vital statistics

**1.5°C** - The maximum global temperature rise to avoid environmental catastrophe<sup>5</sup>

**2%** - UK land mass covered by ancient woodland<sup>6</sup>

**7%** - UK native woodland cover<sup>7</sup>

**13%** - UK woodland cover of all types<sup>8</sup>

**19%** - Woodland cover recommended by the Committee on Climate Change if the UK is to be carbon neutral by 2050<sup>9</sup>

**1.5 million** - Hectares of additional woodland required by 2050 if the UK is to meet its carbon neutral target<sup>10</sup>

**0.4 million** - Hectares of additional UK woodland by 2050 if planting rates remain the same as 2018/19<sup>11</sup>

**84%** - The proportion of the UK public who agree with the statement "a lot more trees should be planted" in response to climate change<sup>12</sup>

**3,781 million** - Tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent currently removed by UK forests<sup>13</sup>

**53%** - Proportion of UK woodland wildlife species in decline<sup>14</sup>

**95%** - Proportion of the UK public who value woodlands for their wildlife value.<sup>15</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup> [www.ipcc.ch/sr15/](http://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming](http://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming)

<sup>3</sup> [www.ipbes.net/global-assessment-biodiversity-ecosystem-services](http://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment-biodiversity-ecosystem-services)

<sup>4</sup> [www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/state-of-nature-reporting](http://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/state-of-nature-reporting)



## 2. How trees and woods help the UK respond to the climate and biodiversity crises

Trees and woodland ecosystems play a triple role in helping the country respond to climate change through:

### 1. Capturing unavoidable emissions

It is vital that all parts of the UK economy and society achieve urgent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Where emissions are unavoidable, trees and woodland ecosystems are essential for capturing those gases. Trees and soil lock up carbon dioxide and absorb highly damaging pollutants, such as sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxides. A wide diversity of site-appropriate tree species is required to remove and store greenhouse gases. Farms can accommodate more tree planting in ways which support farming objectives, including the diversification of income streams, reducing soil erosion and supporting crop pollinators. Trees can also play a role in the interception and capture of ammonia emissions. And planting tree belts can buffer ancient woodland sites from existing sources of pollution.

### 2. Helping cities cope with climate change

Scientists at the cutting edge of climate change forecast major environmental, health and economic problems in coming years due to the overheating of urban buildings and urban areas. Trees in gardens, streets, schools, parks and other publicly accessible places provide shade; reduce air and ground temperatures; improve air quality by absorbing pollutants; and help to mitigate surface water flooding<sup>16</sup>. The cooling shade of trees and water saved the UK £248 million by maintaining productivity and lowering air conditioning costs on hot days in 2017<sup>17</sup>.

### 3. Helping the UK countryside cope with climate change

One of the major consequences of climate change for wildlife is that conditions within their current ranges become unsuitable. Bigger, better and more joined up woodlands are important to help many species move and adapt in response to changing conditions.

In rural areas, trees can provide shade and shelter for farm livestock, help to prevent soil erosion, and moderate the microclimate of crops. Strategically placed trees can also help to alleviate flooding through intercepting rainfall and increasing percolation rates into the soil.



Phil Forthby/WTMU

## References

<sup>5</sup> IPCC, 2018: *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Water eld (eds.)].



### 3. The current woodland creation situation

Woodland planting has increased in the UK in recent years, primarily due to increases in Scotland, according to Forest Research data<sup>18</sup>. The other countries within the UK have recorded very low rates of woodland creation.

The percentage of woodland cover<sup>19</sup> in the UK stands at 13% (10% in England, 15% in Wales, 19% in Scotland and 8% in Northern Ireland). Native woodland accounts for only about 7% of land area in England, 8% in Wales, 4% in Scotland and 3% in Northern Ireland.



Laurie Campbell/WTML

#### References

<sup>6</sup> *Protecting Ancient Woodland*, House of Commons Library, Number CDP 2015/0126

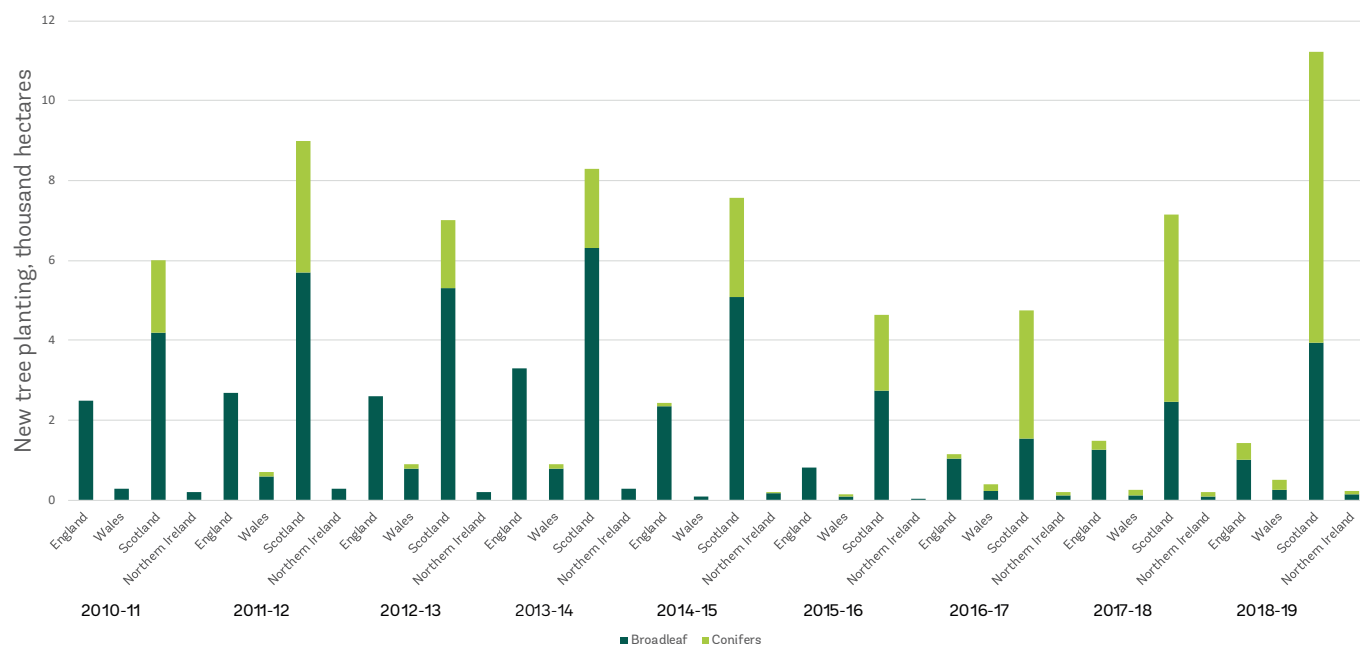
<sup>7</sup> *The State of the UK's forests, woods and trees, perspectives from the sector*, Sian Atkinson and Mike Townsend, Woodland Trust

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

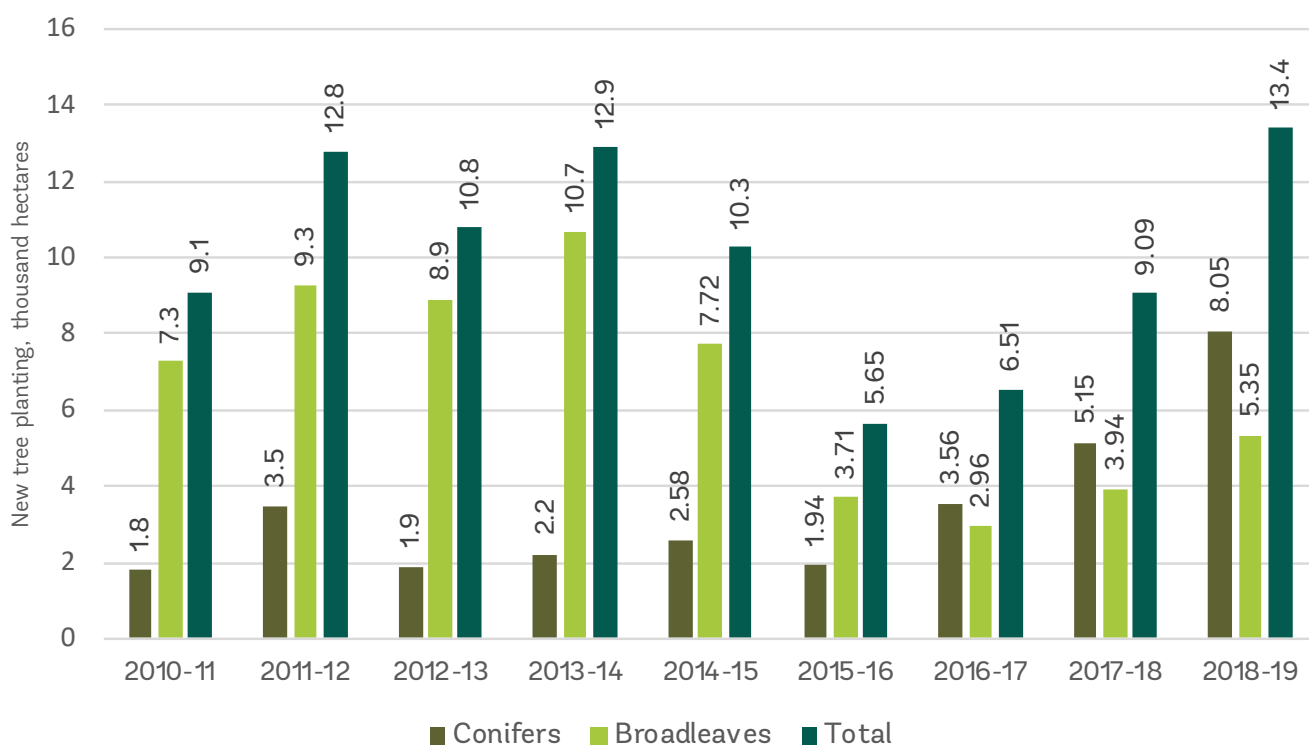
<sup>9</sup> [www.theccc.org.uk/publications](http://www.theccc.org.uk/publications)

<sup>10</sup> *Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change*, Committee on Climate Change, November 2018

## UK country-by-country new tree planting 2010-19



## UK new tree planting 2010-19



## References

- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/>
- <sup>12</sup> *Public opinion of forestry – climate change*, Forest Research, <https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2018/uk-forests-and-climate-change/public-opinion-of-forestry-climate-change/>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2016-introduction/uk-forests-and-climate-change/forest-carbon-stock/>

## 4. How much more woodland and tree cover does the UK need?

The UK has become a country with one of the lowest levels of woodland cover in Europe. It is also one of the most nature depleted countries in the world<sup>20</sup>.

**“The Woodland Trust supports an increase in UK woodland cover from its current 13% of land area to 19%<sup>23</sup> by 2050 to tackle this country’s biodiversity and climate crises.”**

The independent Committee on Climate Change, which advises the UK Government and devolved administrations on emissions targets, recommends increasing woodland cover in the UK from 13%<sup>21</sup> to a minimum of 17% by 2050, and ideally, to 19% to ensure the country achieves net zero carbon emissions. This six percentage point increase equates to about 1.5 million hectares of additional woodland.

It is vital that any new targets and policies for woodland cover also take into account additional losses of trees. For example, the UK faces the loss of approximately 150 million mature trees and 2 billion saplings and seedlings<sup>22</sup> to ash dieback disease in the next 10 to 20 years.

Short term targets are essential to ensure progress is made and measured over policy, grant and political cycles.

It is important that woodland expansion targets are ambitious yet realistic. They need to drive policy makers to invest in the structures, skills, regulation and advice

required to deliver in terms of both the quantity and quality of new woodland. This means expanding tree cover in the right places and right ways to deliver a range of benefits, such as wildlife, public access and carbon capture and storage.

In addition, UK nurseries will need time to build up their stocks of trees grown in the UK. UK sourced and grown trees can reduce the risks of importing tree pests and disease into the country.

Trees outside woods are also an essential component of increasing tree cover to meet the needs of people and wildlife. Trees outside woods are those which do not fall within the definition of a woodland, such as individual trees or hedgerows. The Committee on Climate Change recommends a significant expansion of trees outside woods to achieve net carbon zero, including agroforestry (trees integrated into farming systems) and hedgerows. This is in addition to any new woodland cover.

The UK needs dedicated separate targets for the additional expansion of tree cover outside woodlands, such as agroforestry, hedgerows and urban street trees<sup>24</sup>.

**The majority of tree cover expansion should be delivered with native woods and trees, due to the importance of tackling the nature and climate crises together.**

However, the UK needs significantly higher levels of all types of tree cover, including sustainable production-focused plantations, which will often be a mix of native and non-native tree species. A core principle for all expansion is that it should not detrimentally affect important local wildlife, and should seek to maximise future wildlife value.

### The Woodland Trust recommended targets until 2025

	Woodland Trust proposed target per annum (ha) until 2025	Actual planting rates in 2018/19 (ha)
Wales	5,000	520
England	10,000	1,420
Scotland	18,000	11,210
Northern Ireland	2,000	240
<b>Total UK</b>	<b>35,000</b>	<b>13,390 (circa. 40% native woodland)</b>

**Beyond 2025, the Woodland Trust proposes that the individual targets for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales increase further, in line with the trajectories required to achieve 19% UK woodland cover<sup>23</sup> by 2050.**

## References

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/public-opinion-of-forestry/>

<sup>16</sup> Woodland Trust, 2019. [woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2019/01/residential-developments-and-trees/](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2019/01/residential-developments-and-trees/)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/uknaturalcapitalaccounts/2019>



## 5. What type of tree cover expansion?

The decisions the UK and devolved Governments make today about trees and woods will impact future generations for centuries. It's vitally important to get them right.

To increase tree cover the UK needs to pursue a mix of approaches, at a variety of scales appropriate to the landscape. These must include expanding native woodland, sustainable commercial plantations, agroforestry, urban trees, hedges and individual countryside trees. This strategic approach will maximise the multiple benefits of more trees and woods, and minimise the risk of any single approach failing.

**All trees capture carbon while they are growing. However, carbon also needs to be stored for long periods to avoid passing on the climate change problem to the next generation. This is why the longevity of trees and woodland ecosystems is a key factor in policy design.**

Some of the UK's native species, such as oak and yew, can live for over 1,000 years, effectively capturing and storing carbon for a millennium.

There is also evidence that large, old trees fix significantly larger levels of carbon compared to smaller trees. A single big tree can add the same amount of carbon to the forest within a year as is contained in an entire mid-sized tree<sup>25</sup>. This is one of many reasons why **UK policy must prioritise the protection and restoration of existing trees and ancient woodland alongside any expansion plans.**

While any sensibly located and managed expansion of tree cover can have a positive impact on the UK's journey to carbon neutrality, designing new woods solely for carbon is something we cannot afford to do. New woods

must deliver local benefits for wildlife and people too.

**The UK does not have the time or resources to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises separately.**

Much of the UK's woodland wildlife is entirely dependent on native woods and trees. For example, there are 2,300 species dependent on oak for at least part of their life, 326 of which are only found on oak, and a further 229 species which are rarely found on any species other than oak<sup>25</sup>. This highlights the biodiversity associated with native tree species. If UK wildlife is to recover and adapt in the face of climate change, then the protection, restoration and expansion of native trees have to be a major part of the nation's response.

Policy makers also need to ensure trees and woodlands are resilient to projected local climate conditions. The evidence shows that the majority of native tree species hold a high proportion of genetic diversity. If trees are supported to self-seed and spread, this can allow genetic mixing and the natural selection of the fittest, so each successive generation of tree can become better adapted to changing climate conditions<sup>27</sup>.

Plantations focused on timber production also have an important role to play in increasing the UK's tree cover. The UK needs to support those markets that drive the sustainable management of all types of woodland, including native woodland. These markets can lock carbon into long-lived construction materials, such as timber framing for housing. A thriving and carefully managed timber market can also be good for wildlife and help support woodland expansion.

Foresters, farmers, land managers, local authorities, businesses, charities and the public all need to play their respective roles in tackling the UK's climate and biodiversity crises. Public policy and funding mechanisms have a vital role to play in driving this action.

### Benefits of native woodland and trees:

- Biodiverse habitats
- Long-term carbon capture
- Flood alleviation<sup>29</sup>
- Improved water quality<sup>30</sup>
- Soil retention
- Cultural heritage
- Forest products such as timber
- Improved mental and physical health<sup>31</sup>

### Capturing carbon in wood products

Wood products with a long life can play an important role in storing carbon. The most beneficial of these products replace high carbon emitting alternatives. A good example is using timber in construction to replace concrete.

## References

<sup>16</sup> *Forestry Statistics*. Forestry Commission. September 2019. [forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics](https://forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics)

<sup>19</sup> This does not differentiate between native or non-native, semi-natural or plantation.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> 13% does not include canopy cover of trees outside areas defined as woodland, including hedges, field trees, city trees, riverside trees, wood pasture and so on.

## Natural woodland regeneration

Alongside tree planting, the natural regeneration of woodland needs to play more of an integral and complementary role in the UK's expansion of its tree cover. Natural regeneration is where trees self-seed and spread themselves. Incentives to encourage natural regeneration are urgently needed alongside greater levels of planting, because:

- 1. Natural regeneration provides a variety of different habitat structures in young woodland for a wide range of wildlife.**
- 2. Scientific evidence shows that the UK's native tree species have a wide genetic diversity, which can enable adaptation to climate change (and other threats such as tree disease). Natural regeneration supports genetic mixing and the natural selection of the fittest.**
- 3. Natural regeneration can help to reduce the need for importing tree stocks. Imported trees carry an increased risk of introducing new pests and diseases.**
- 4. Natural regeneration can be cheaper than planting. It can also be integrated with lower density planting to achieve the same objectives. However, in many cases self-seeded saplings will require protection and management of grazing and browsing animals.**



Richard Beeky/WTML

## References

<sup>22</sup> [sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=19770](https://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=19770)

<sup>23</sup> This is a UK level figure and should not be interpreted as all individual countries aiming for 19%, as some, such as Scotland, are already at 19% cover.

<sup>24</sup> These are not currently counted in UK woodland cover statistics.

<sup>25</sup> Stephenson, N., Das, A., Condit, R. et al. Rate of tree carbon accumulation increases continuously with tree size. *Nature* 507, 90–93 (2014) doi:10.1038/nature12914





Laurie Campbell/NTML

## References

<sup>26</sup> Mitchell, R.J. et al. (2019) *Biological Conservation* 233:316-327 DOI 10.1016/j.biocon.2019.03.040

<sup>27</sup> See [forestresearch.gov.uk/research/genetic-considerations-provenance-choice-native-trees-under-climate-change-england](https://forestresearch.gov.uk/research/genetic-considerations-provenance-choice-native-trees-under-climate-change-england) and [www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/is-the-introduction-of-novel-exotic-forest-tree-species-a-rational-response-to-rapid-environmental-change-\(725af6fe-4ef8-4345-8f06-634eb59414ff\)/export.html](https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/is-the-introduction-of-novel-exotic-forest-tree-species-a-rational-response-to-rapid-environmental-change-(725af6fe-4ef8-4345-8f06-634eb59414ff)/export.html)

<sup>28</sup> Mitchell, R.J. et al. (2019) *Biological Conservation* 233:316-327 DOI 10.1016/j.biocon.2019.03.040



## 6. Where should the new trees go?

Trees and woods need to become a bigger part of our lives across all landscapes, both rural and urban.

A significant proportion of new trees can be integrated within existing land uses. For example, planting more trees in field corners, headlands and hedgerows on farms can boost agricultural production while also delivering carbon and wildlife benefits. The Committee on Climate Change proposes integrating trees into one fifth of current agricultural land, supported by healthier diets and lower food waste. This needs to be done through supporting and working with land owners and farmers.

On average, only 11% of urban areas are currently covered by 'trees outside woods'. These trees tend to be a varied selection of native and non-native species. In many urban areas there is huge potential to expand the tree canopy cover and deliver multiple benefits for both people and wildlife. Some councils are already taking action, such as Wycombe Council, which proposed that all new developments should include at least 25% tree canopy cover.

The Natural Capital Committee's third report<sup>32</sup> to the UK Government highlighted the huge benefits of creating new woodland close to where people live. These benefits include mental health well-being, improved air quality and reduced flood risk. The Woodland Trust has researched and developed the Woodland Access Standard (WAST), which in England is endorsed by the Forestry Commission and is complementary to Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard. The Trust maintains a database of open access woodlands and periodically publishes an analysis of the proportion of the population that has access to a wood in accordance with the WAST<sup>33</sup>. This can identify areas that are deficient in access, and which would therefore benefit most from woodland creation. This data is available free of charge, both in map and in numerical/spatial form, to interested parties.

The location and ongoing management of new tree cover is vitally important in determining the range of benefits that the country will see now and in the future. Despite the overall expansion in land area covered by woodland since the 1970s, woodland species continue to decline, as evidenced by the UK woodland bird indicator, which fell by 25% between 1970 and 2017<sup>34</sup>. Planting mistakes of the past, such as the afforestation of both peatland and important existing wildlife habitats, also need to be avoided.

### New National Forest for Wales

The Welsh Government's plan for a new national forest for Wales provides an opportunity for a bold, ambitious and innovative approach to help mitigate climate change, restore nature, deliver health and well-being benefits and make a valuable contribution to the regeneration of local communities. Planned and delivered well, this project could connect north to south, urban to rural and people to nature.

The Northern Forest is a flagship partnership project across a swathe of the north of England between Liverpool and Hull. The Woodland Trust, the Mersey Forest, City of Trees, White Rose Forest and HEYwoods, supported by Government and many others, are committed to a major expansion in tree canopy cover within the Northern Forest over the next 25 years.

The Northern Forest provides a live illustration of decisions about where new trees and woodland are established if we want to realise the multiple benefits they can provide.

Our research shows that the M62 corridor, urbanisation and the lack of woodland in the Pennines will all act as significant barriers to the movement of wildlife in a changing climate. With 13 million people living across an area that has a mere 7.6% woodland cover, the Trust wants to show how well-placed woods and trees can help wildlife, absorb millions of tonnes of carbon, reduce the risk of flooding, make people happier and healthier, and create thousands of new green jobs.

Modelling has shown the consequences of different approaches to delivering woodland creation targets in the Northern Forest (see illustrations to the right). The two maps show how different priorities deliver quite different models of expansion.

The 'Dash for Carbon' scenario prioritises establishing fast-growing plantations in the Pennines for rapid carbon sequestration.

The 'Nature@Work' scenario models how the same area of tree cover (created through planting at variable scales and densities of native woodland, trees outside woods, and commercial forestry) can deliver a far greater range of urgently needed outcomes, including carbon sequestration, a reduction in flood risk, improved health and wellbeing, and a restoration of ecological networks for wildlife<sup>35</sup>.

## References

<sup>29</sup> [woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2013/02/pontbren-project-sustainable-uplands-management](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2013/02/pontbren-project-sustainable-uplands-management)

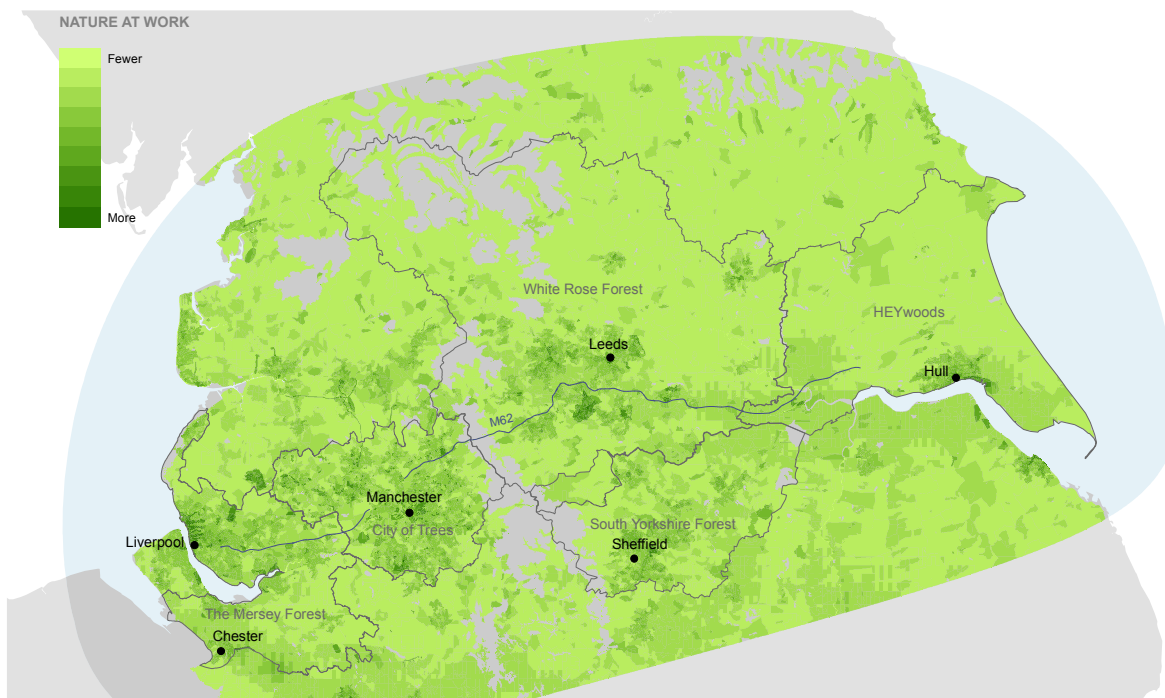
<sup>30</sup> [forestresearch.gov.uk/research/forest-hydrology/riparian-woodland-and-water-protection](http://forestresearch.gov.uk/research/forest-hydrology/riparian-woodland-and-water-protection)

<sup>31</sup> [foresteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Forest\\_book\\_final\\_WEBpdf.pdf](http://foresteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Forest_book_final_WEBpdf.pdf)

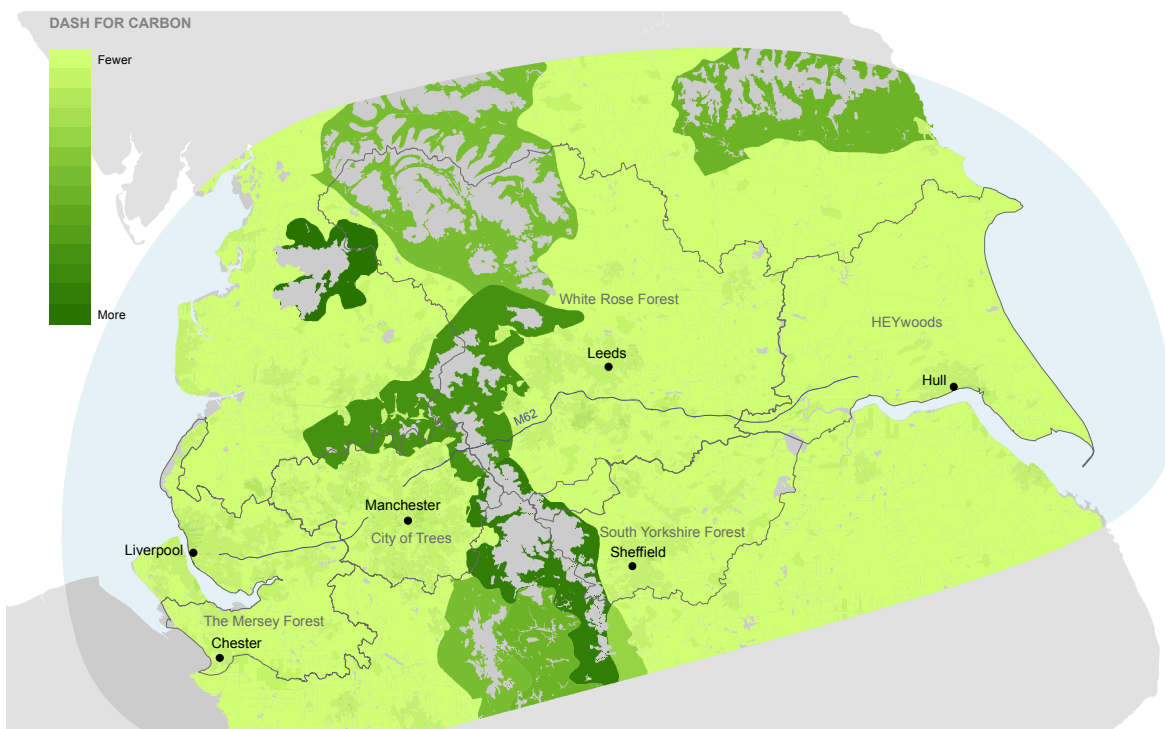
<sup>32</sup> *The state of natural capital: protecting and improving natural capital for prosperity and wellbeing*: [gov.uk/government/publications/natural-capital-committees-third-state-of-natural-capital-report](http://gov.uk/government/publications/natural-capital-committees-third-state-of-natural-capital-report)



## Two different models for tree cover expansion



The 'Nature@Work' scenario creates the same area of tree cover as the 'Dash for Carbon' but over a wider area, delivering both carbon sequestration and wider environmental and social benefits.



The 'Dash for Carbon' scenario creates a narrow corridor of fast-growing plantation in the Pennines to sequester carbon.

## References

<sup>33</sup> Woodland Trust, 2017: [woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2017/06/space-for-people-2017](https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2017/06/space-for-people-2017)

<sup>34</sup> <https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-UK-full-report.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that both these scenarios were mapped at a macro scale, and it is fully recognised that all new woodland creation needs to be designed and delivered in tandem with in depth constraints mapping to ensure the 'right trees in the right place'.

<sup>36</sup> **including schools, housing associations and health service bodies**

## 7. Key recommendations

The following actions will be fundamental to deliver effective and timely tree-based climate mitigation that is good for people and for nature.

**Governments across the UK need to take the following steps:**

**Look after the trees we have:**

- **Protect and restore existing trees and native woodland**

The increasing pressure of development and the absence of appropriate management are posing an increasing threat to existing woodland carbon stores and irreplaceable wildlife havens. Far too many valued woods and trees remain threatened by development – especially from major infrastructure projects – despite steps forward in planning protections in some areas.

- **Prevent tree pests and disease**

Without adequate safeguards, the drive to increase tree cover could increase the risk of outbreaks of tree diseases through importing large amounts of trees. Increasing numbers of tree pests and diseases are attacking the UK's trees with devastating consequences. One of the major ways that tree pests and diseases enter the UK is through imported trees and wood. Stronger biosecurity checks, quarantine periods and resources to deal with new pest and disease outbreaks are essential. Public procurement should stipulate UK sourced and grown trees to invest in our tree nurseries and reduce the demand for imported trees. Government should also develop a funding mechanism to enable nurseries to invest now to create tree stock of suitable species and sizes for both rural and urban planting in the future. We need to start growing today the trees we need in the future.

**New policies, capacity and funding for woods and trees:**

- **Set quantity and quality targets for new tree cover**

Integrated policy targets are essential (see Section 4 for a country-by-country breakdown) and must measure success in increasing tree cover in terms of both quantity and quality. This will help to ensure that a rapid expansion of tree cover also drives the recovery of wildlife; enriches people's lives through providing high quality access; and sequesters and stores carbon.

- **An emergency increase in capacity in tree and woodland teams at all levels of national and local Government.**

The lack of dedicated capacity and skilled staff to support and provide advice on woodland expansion is causing bottlenecks across government agencies and

local authorities. This in turn is dissuading landowners from taking up grants, slowing down woodland creation approvals, and limiting opportunities to drive new markets. In addition, local authorities are struggling to resource capacity to record (digitised) and administer laws for protecting trees with preservation orders.

- **Invest public money in public goods**

Public goods are qualities such as thriving wildlife, clean rivers, carbon stores and clean air – features that we all need and from which we all benefit, but which markets tend to ignore. This is why government action is critical. Every part of the UK needs an emergency increase in ongoing public funding for the protection, restoration and significant expansion of native woodland and tree cover. Public investment in new tree cover should be targeted to maximise the range and depth of public goods delivered in order to ensure public value for money.

- **Public woods must set an example**

Public forested estates should provide exemplary public value by integrating climate action with high quality access and wildlife recovery. These estates should lead the way through demonstrating the art of the possible. For example, public forests could strategically reinvest local hardwood markets to drive new economic investment in native woodland expansion. They could also support markets for management that improve the condition of existing woodlands for wildlife. Other public land managers should develop strategies for integrating far greater levels of woodland and trees into their landholdings.

- **Support new markets for trees and woods**

Urgent policies which better reflect the full range of values provided by woodland are required to encourage new markets for an expansion in tree cover. These values include carbon storage, flood protection, biodiversity, habitat provision, and wider ecosystem services. New policies should include prioritising a stronger, nature-based carbon offset market for any unavoidable emissions. This would allow businesses to support wildlife and climate friendly woodland expansion solutions. It is also essential that the Government establishes a minimum carbon price that reflects the true costs of expanding tree cover.

- **Integrate land use strategies**

Forestry and woodland have been treated separately to other land uses for far too long. Land use policies within each country in the UK urgently need to be joined up and integrated to support a more holistic and long-term approach to how the UK manages its land for future generations.

- **Promote natural regeneration**

Government policy has traditionally treated areas of scrub and natural woodland regeneration as problem zones to

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## References

<sup>37</sup> [forestresearch.gov.uk/research/i-tree-eco/](https://forestresearch.gov.uk/research/i-tree-eco/)

<sup>38</sup> This does not include ancient/veteran trees which are irreplaceable and should be retained.

be cleared, due to their perceived lack of agricultural value. Each country in the UK needs new grants to broaden the palette of support and allow land managers to prioritise the management of trees to self-seed and spread, as a complement to tree planting and scrub creation.

#### Local authorities need to take the following steps:

- **Ensure development land includes trees**  
Every local authority should commit to a minimum 30% tree canopy cover target for new development land. For example, a developer levy could stipulate that a minimum of 10 trees are planted for every new house constructed.
- **Commission and deliver an Emergency Tree Plan**  
All local authority areas must be surveyed to identify creation, restoration and protection opportunities for woods and trees, in particular on public landholdings<sup>36</sup>, by the end of 2020. This could include tree canopy surveys of local authority landholdings (using a tool such as iTree Canopy<sup>37</sup>) to set new tree cover targets. Local authorities should use the results to inform their tree and woodland strategies by 2022, with emergency resources allocated to ensure delivery and integration across all policy areas.
- **Protect trees outside woods**  
Local authorities must avoid the removal of any tree on their land in non-woodland areas, unless there are overriding arboricultural or health and safety needs for felling. If a tree must be removed, local authorities should implement minimum replacement planting ratios, which stipulate that for every non-woodland tree removed at least three new trees should be planted<sup>38</sup>. These new trees should be located as close to the original location as possible and be the same type of planting (for example, street trees replaced by street trees).

## 8. About The Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust is committed to playing a central role in the expansion, restoration and protection of native trees and woodland in the UK. In 2018 the Trust planted, distributed or sold 3,254,048 trees, creating some 1,714 hectares of new woodland across the UK. In England, the Trust planted over 500 hectares of native broadleaf woodland. The Trust stands ready to continue and expand its work with Government, partners, landowners, community groups and schools.

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