

**Woodland Trust Submission  
North Dorset Local Plan Review – Consultation Response**

As the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, the Woodland Trust's vision is for a UK rich in native woods and trees, for people and wildlife. We work to protect, restore and create native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future. We manage over 1,250 sites, including over 200 sites in the South West, and have 500,000 members and supporters.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the North Dorset Local Plan review and are pleased to be working with you in this area.

The Woodland Trust believes that, in the context of high levels of proposed housing growth, it is essential to consider the protection of woods and trees, particularly irreplaceable ancient woodland and any opportunities for woodland creation. This is particularly significant in North Dorset where there are important areas of ancient woodland which would benefit from woodland creation to extend, buffer and protect and to promote biodiversity and connectivity.

We note that there is pressure to review the policy relating to 'Important Open or Wooded Areas'. The Woodland Trust believes that this presents an opportunity to develop a robust strategic and policy approach to the protection of woods and trees, the restoration of planted ancient woodland (where appropriate) and the planting of more woods and trees in North Dorset. Although housing and infrastructure growth can create pressure on the natural environment, it also provides an opportunity to bring forward green infrastructure. All new developments should result in 'net gain' for biodiversity. This is apparent at the national policy level with the publication of the government's Clean Growth Strategy and the 25 year plan for the environment which has a strong emphasis on tree planting and woodland creation.

***Protecting our Natural Environment in North Dorset:***

Ancient woods are irreplaceable. They are our richest terrestrial wildlife habitats, with complex ecological communities that have developed over centuries, and contain a high proportion of rare and threatened species, many of which are dependent on the particular conditions that this habitat affords. For this reason, ancient woods are reservoirs of biodiversity, but because the resource is limited and highly fragmented, they and their associated wildlife are particularly vulnerable.

Their long continuity and lack of disturbance means ancient woods are often also living history books, preserving archaeological features and evidence of past land use, from earthworks to charcoal pits. They are also places of great aesthetic appeal, making them attractive for recreation and the many benefits this can bring in terms of health and wellbeing.

With only 2.4% of the land area in Great Britain covered by ancient woodland, it is essential that no more of this finite resource is lost through development pressure or mismanagement. This means

that ancient woodland must be protected absolutely from permanent clearance, but also that it must be protected from damaging effects of adjacent and nearby land-use that could threaten the integrity of the habitat and survival of its special characteristics.

The Woodland Trust would therefore like to see the North Dorset Local Plan make explicit reference to the protection of ancient woodland, and of ancient and veteran trees outside woods, by stating that development affecting ancient woodland should only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

A good recent example from **Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan - Adopted Dec 2016** includes the following:

Policy ENV1: Protection of trees, woodland, orchards and hedgerows

*Development should seek to minimise impact on trees, woodlands, orchards, historic parklands and hedgerows of value to the areas landscape, character or wildlife and seek to provide net gain where possible. Where the loss is unavoidable, the works (or development) should be timed to avoid disturbance to species that are protected by law. Adequate provision must be made to compensate for this loss. Development which would result in the loss of Ancient Woodland, Aged or Veteran Trees will not be permitted. The proper management of this resource for nature conservation purposes will be sought.*

A recent good example from **Ipswich Borough Council Local Plan** includes the following wording in Policy DM10:

*The Council will protect and ensure the care of trees and increase canopy cover in the interests of amenity and biodiversity by:*

- a. making Tree Preservation Orders;*
- b. in relation to applications for works to trees, only granting consent for felling, topping, lopping or uprooting if a sound arboricultural reason is provided;*
- c. adhering to the principles of BS3998 'Tree work – Recommendations' 2010 for established tree management options (including soil care and tree felling);*
- d. refusing planning permission for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss; and*
- e. encouraging tree planting to help achieve a target of 22% canopy cover by 2050. Applications for development should retain existing trees and hedgerows of amenity or biodiversity value where possible. Where development affecting trees or hedgerows is proposed, the application must be accompanied by:*
- f. an accurate survey and assessment of all existing trees and hedgerows on site in accordance with BS5837 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations)' 2012 by a competent arborist; and*
- g. details of protective measures to be put in place during the development process to ensure the health and safety of each specimen and hedgerow to be retained; and*
- h. where removal of a mature tree is proposed, a plan for replacement planting on a two for one basis and using semi-mature specimens, unless otherwise agreed by the Council.*

*Design in new development should have proper regard to the setting of protected trees.*

*Landscaping and tree planting should be integrated into new development.*

### **Enhancing our Natural Environment in North Dorset:**

The scale of proposed housing growth and infrastructure development in North Dorset can be a threat to our natural environment but, when well-planned and resourced, can also provide an opportunity to deliver green infrastructure. It is essential that there is an ambitious approach to ensuring every opportunity is taken to achieve 'net gain' for biodiversity through the planning process. We would welcome a strong commitment to delivering green infrastructure as part of the Local Plan review process.

The Woodland Trust believes that trees and woods can deliver a wide range of benefits, and this is strongly supported by current national planning policy. Woodland creation is especially important because of the unique ability of woodland to deliver across a wide range of benefits: - these include for both landscape and biodiversity (helping habitats become more robust to adapt to climate change, buffering and extending fragmented ancient woodland), for quality of life and climate change (amenity & recreation, public health, air quality flood amelioration, urban cooling) and for the local economy (timber and woodfuel markets and supporting agroforestry).

The **National Planning Policy Framework** (NPPF) supports the need for more habitat creation by stating that: *'Local planning authorities should: set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure'*, (DCLG, March 2012, para 114). Also para 117 states that: *'To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should:....promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan'*.

The **England Biodiversity Strategy** makes it clear that expansion of priority habitats like native woodland remains a key aim - *'Priority action: Bring a greater proportion of our existing woodlands into sustainable management and expand the area of woodland in England'*, (*Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystems services*, DEFRA 2011, p.26).

A reading of these two policies in the National Planning Policy Framework together with the England Biodiversity Strategy indicates that habitat expansion, like native woodland creation, should form a high priority North Dorset's Local Plan. The strong emphasis on woodland creation in the 25 Year Plan for the Environment confirms that this policy approach has strong political traction and needs to be delivered.

The levels of development proposed for this area create parallel opportunities for environmental growth, and it is essential that a range of green infrastructure should be prioritised at the outset including clear targets to increase tree canopy cover across the plan area. The Woodland Trust would like to see a strong commitment here to the expectations on developers to provide trees as part of a new development or of any regeneration scheme. Our guide to [residential developments and trees](#) may help to provide a framework.

The Woodland Trust recommends that our **Woodland Access Standard be adopted here as a measure of success**. This standard aims to ensure everyone has reasonable access to woodland – as encapsulated in our [Space for People](#) publication.

The Woodland Trust's Woodland Access Standard aspires that:

- No person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2ha in size; and
- There should also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20ha within 4km (8km round trip) of people's homes

Woods make particularly outstanding green spaces for public access because of the experience of nature they provide, their visual prominence alongside buildings which offers balance between the built and natural worlds, their low maintenance costs and their ability to accommodate large numbers of visitors. Trees also have a strong role to play in water management, improving air quality, and combatting the effects of urban heat island.

A good example of proactive support for woodland creation is **Leeds Core Strategy**.

*“POLICY G1: ENHANCING AND EXTENDING GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE Where a development is considered to be acceptable within or adjoining areas defined as Green Infrastructure on Map 16 or on any future LDF Allocation Documents, development proposals should ensure that: (i) Green Infrastructure/corridor function of the land is retained and improved, particularly in areas of growth, (ii) Where appropriate, the opportunity is taken to extend Green Infrastructure by linking green spaces or by filling in gaps in Green Infrastructure corridors, including (where relevant) extending these into Leeds City Centre. Street trees and green roofs are particularly encouraged, (iii) A landscaping scheme is provided which deals positively with the transition between development and any adjoining open land, (iv) The opportunity is taken to increase appropriate species of woodland cover in the District, (v) Provision for and retention of biodiversity and wildlife, (iv) Opportunities are taken to protect and enhance the Public Rights of Way (PROW) network through avoiding unnecessary diversions and by adding new links.*

*POLICY G2: CREATION OF NEW TREE COVER Development which would result in harm to, or the loss of, Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees will be resisted. In supporting the need and desire to increase native and appropriate tree cover, the Council will, on its own initiative and through the development process, including developer contributions, work towards increasing appropriate species of woodland cover in the District. Delivery will involve planting in both urban and rural areas, and partnership with the Forestry Commission, Natural England and landowners. Development in the urban area of the City, including the City Centre will include the planting of street trees in appropriately designed pits to increase the area of tree canopy cover.*

*Trees and woodland cover are important components of Leeds' landscape character. West Yorkshire Ecology information (2003) show that there were 3,660 hectares of woodland (sites of over 2 hectares) within the Leeds District, representing 6.45% of the land area. Over 1,282 hectares (sites over 2 hectares) is owned and managed by the Council. These woodlands vary in size and complexity, from the large estates at Temple Newsam and Chevin Forest Park, to small, urban woodlands such as Skelton Wood in North East Leeds. The Council plans to increase the amount of woodland cover for the benefit of both people and wildlife as well as improve landscape quality. The need to maintain and increase tree cover also helps to combat the effects of climate change such as providing valuable shade in the densely developed areas that will suffer most from rising temperatures.”*

Trees & woods can play a significant role in sustaining the landscape scale connectivity that underpins ecological resilience and helps combat climate change effects. The varied and unique habitats woodland sites provide for many of the UK's most important and threatened fauna and flora species cannot be re-created and cannot afford to be lost.

The recent announcement from Theresa May on the Northern Forest project and the new 25 Year Plan for the environment highlights the political commitment to woodland creation.

We hope you will take these comments into consideration as part of the consultation process. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to get in touch via this email address

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Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]

**Catherine Brabner-Evans**  
South West External Affairs Officer

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