

The North York Moors National Park Authority

Tree and Woodland Strategy 2023

Purpose

This Tree and Woodland Strategy has been developed to inform the North York Moors National Park Authority's aspirations, actions and decisions.

In April 2022 a new statutory National Park Management Plan was published for the North York Moors and this strategy sets out how the Authority, as an organisation, will ensure that trees and woodlands will help to achieve the Plan's outcomes as well as setting out a long-term vision.



Map of the North York Moors National Park showing the main areas of woodland

Facts and figures

Woodland covers 22% of the National Park. As shown in Table 1 a high proportion of woodland is productive conifer with the majority of this being managed by Forestry England. Approximately 65% of woodland cover is conifer and 35% is broadleaved woodland.

Table 1 - Source: Forestry Commission copyright 2019 – National Forest Inventory data

Total woodland	Conifer	Felled	Broadleaved	Young trees	Mixed	Other
31,478 ha	13,997 ha	4,767 ha	9,717 ha	1,726 ha	1,064 ha	207ha
-	45%	15%	31%	5%	4%	-

About 20% of the woodland is 'ancient' having been continuously wooded for 400 years. Over half of these sites have been re-planted over the past 60 years with conifers leaving 2,683 ha of high quality ancient semi-natural woodland.

There are approximately 1,400 ha of woodland designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest with 175ha also protected at an international level as Special Areas of Conservation. Around 60% of these designated woodlands are currently in 'favourable condition'.

1,350 individual veteran trees have been surveyed and recorded. The actual number of veteran trees will be significantly higher than this. The main concentration is within the Rye Valley in the south west of the National Park with oak as the dominant species.

Forest Research are intending to make a new remote sensing dataset available which will be of use to the Authority in monitoring both woodland and tree cover.



Long term vision

“The trees and woodland of the North York Moors National Park will form an important part of a resilient landscape and will help address climate change and nature recovery. They will increase the biodiversity, beauty and variety of the place whilst being part of its cultural heritage and contributing to people’s health and well-being. They will contribute, where possible, to a diverse, innovative, low carbon economy and be an asset to local communities.”

Aims

1. Ensure that existing trees and woodlands deliver as much as they can for National Park purposes.
2. Create good quality wooded habitat.

Outcomes and how trees and woodlands will contribute

The 2022 Management Plan sets out six key outcomes that the Authority and partners aspire to make happen and we state here how the Authority will ensure that trees and woodlands contribute to each of these.

Outcome 1 - A resilient landscape at the forefront of addressing climate change and nature recovery

Carbon - It is widely recognised that trees capture and retain significant amounts of carbon and as such the Authority is committed to encouraging a large increase in trees and woodland. To achieve the ambition of 'creating at least 2,500 ha of additional wooded habitat by 2032*' the Authority and stakeholders will have to accept the need for landscape change. The scale of change is significant but the rate of change will be slow which should allow people to become gradually accustomed to it. The Authority will take a leading role in encouraging the acceptance and facilitation of this necessary landscape change by appropriate research, education and effective communication.

***2,500ha is 1.74% of National Park's area. Definition of wooded habitat = an area of land with trees and shrubs where their canopy cover is over 20% when viewed from above.**

The Woodsmith Mine's S106 agreement funds the Authority to create 73ha of woodland annually until 2115. The Authority is committed to reducing the amount of plastic used when establishing trees. The removal and recycling of plastic tree tubes will be a condition of all Authority agreements. Pesticide use will also be reduced in the process of establishing woodland.

Ensure that new tree planting is never on areas of deep peat as this is shown to release carbon through drying soils. Increased risk of wildfire will continue to be addressed via the NYM's Fire Liaison Panel which is chaired by the Authority and attended by Forestry England (FE) and other bodies.

The Authority's Members will be informed of woodland creation proposals if Officers consider that the project warrants this due to its significant nature. Significant is defined as when proposals are considered to have a negative impact on National Park purposes or if an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.

Resilience - Trees, woodlands and the wildlife that relies on them will be more resilient to climate change and disease with a good diversity of species, source/genetics, age and structure. These principles will be employed in all the Authority's own woodland agreements and all woodland projects will be expected to give them due consideration.

Prioritise local provenance trees for sites of high conservation value through local seed collection. Local propagation of species such as juniper will be encouraged to conserve genetic identity and address biosecurity concerns.

Water - Focus native tree planting next to watercourses to improve water quality and for flood alleviation. Support FE to continue their improvement of riparian woodlands to create broadleaved woodland corridors through predominately conifer plantations.

Soil - Ensure tree planting and woodland management is carried out with the least amount of negative impacts on soil from disturbance and compaction.

Outcome 2 - A nature rich, more biodiverse landscape

Connectivity - Ensure that new woodland is created to produce bigger, better and more joined-up habitats. Survey and consultation will ensure that important habitats and species will not be lost when creating woodland. The production of a Local Nature Recovery Plan for the National Park will direct not only woodland creation but also the beneficial management of existing woodlands. Funding through the Boulby Mine S106 agreement provides substantial funding for priority woodland management until 2048.

The Authority will support the restoration of existing hedges and the planting of new hedges which will include trees where suitable.

Ancient woodlands - All ancient woodland sites will either be in favourable ecological condition or in active restoration towards this. Prioritise woodland management work on ancient woodland sites which have important woodland soils and species rich ground flora, especially where these have been planted with conifers. Ensure developments and sporting activities do not adversely affect biodiversity value of ancient woodland sites and other important habitats. Ancient woodland and veteran trees are irreplaceable assets and will be protected in line with the National Planning Policy Framework and the Keepers of Time policy. There will be no net loss of woodland priority habitats. All veteran trees will be retained and protected apart from in wholly exceptional circumstances.

Biodiversity - Improve the biodiversity value of existing woodland by supporting appropriate management. This could be through thinning, creating open space, removal of invasive plants such as rhododendron, or through the control of deer or squirrel. Promote the importance of all deadwood habitats as a valuable part of the woodland ecosystem. The introduction of more trees and scrub on moorland edges, specifically where bracken dominates, will be considered to improve habitat diversity.

Explore options to maximise the biodiversity of newly created wooded habitats, such as creating ponds or introducing ground flora or soils. Careful consideration will be given to proposals for species reintroductions such as pine martin. Support woodland research, such as the Woodland Trust's Future of UK Treescapes programme.

Work with Natural England to ensure that SSSI designated woodlands are brought into favourable condition where possible. Keep abreast of how policy changes may affect trees and woodland, such as Basic Payment Scheme withdrawal of cross compliance requirements.

Natural colonisation – Actively encourage natural colonisation of native woodland where appropriate to allow a more natural functioning ecosystem to develop. This may require concerted deer and rabbit control which should go into the food chain. Increased wooded habitat is likely to result in greater deer numbers which may increase the need for control.

Outcome 3 – A landscape rich in heritage and highly valued for its sense of remoteness and tranquillity

Veteran trees – Our ancient trees are our living history. The Authority is committed to the survey and protection of ancient trees, and to securing the veteran trees of the future. The Authority will continue to plant 'landscape trees' throughout the National Park which will be

especially beneficial in tackling the loss of hedgerow and in-field trees due to ash die-back. Carry out planned veteranisation of trees, where appropriate, to speed up natural processes.

Remote and tranquil - Some of the most remote and tranquil areas in the National Park are within accessible woodlands. This is particularly true of FE's large plantation forests of which the majority enjoy open access. Where the Authority's own woodland creation agreements cover open access land there is a commitment to retain these access rights if the land is ever reassessed.

Historic environment - Woodland creation schemes take into account historic environment features and also the wider historic landscape. Trees are often an intrinsic part of the cultural heritage of an area, indicating human habitation and use. The Authority offers its historic environment expertise when consulted on planned woodland management.

Outcome 4 - A place that lifts the nation's health and well-being

Recreation - Continue positive joint working with FE to ensure maximum benefit for walkers, cyclists and horse riders within the Public Forest. Work with FE and other woodland owners to improve access, facilities and education in woodlands for new audiences.

Outdoor education – Focus on trees and woodlands as great themes to engage children and adults in the Authority's key messages. The propagation and care of planted juniper trees is a project where the Authority works with local schools.

Volunteers - The Authority will investigate social prescribing as a way of encouraging more people to benefit from woodlands' tranquillity. Volunteers will be able to get involved in woodland projects from tree planting to the removal of plastic tree guards and also community archaeology.

Protection - Implement natural flood risk measures to reduce the stress and costs associated with flooding, including support of FE's beaver trial.

Ensure that existing trees are protected from development and inappropriate management, especially on sites which are highly valued by the public. (See 'Statutory Tree Protection' section below.)

Outcome 5 – A place that supports a diverse and innovative low carbon economy

Green skills - The success of the Woodland Restoration Team 2021/22 in upskilling young people in practical woodland conservation has led to a successful partnership with the Royal Forestry Society to employ woodland trainees. Further work is ongoing with partners to develop further opportunities to bring more young people into woodland careers.

Timber – Recognise the economic importance of productive forestry and encourage the ongoing improvement of multi-purpose forests. Support beneficial woodland management projects by improving infrastructure to enable as much timber as possible to be extracted for commercial use and not 'felled to waste' whilst recognising the value of deadwood. Encourage appropriate methods of control for grey squirrel where they threaten tree establishment and timber value. Educate staff, landowners and public in biosecurity to ensure tree health issues are limited.

Outcome 6 – A place of great beauty where local communities thrive

Sustainable wood - The Authority, through its design code, will encourage sustainable local and UK timber use in construction and renovation work.

Local businesses - Support small scale local woodland contractors and nurseries focussed on sustainable and environmentally sensitive practices. The Authority will look at opportunities to continue the plastic tree tube removal and recycling programme begun with the Woodland Restoration Team in 2021/22. The support of a local recycling company was instrumental in this success.

Woodland Creation Principles

Woodland creation supported by the Authority will be of predominantly site native species in order to maximise biodiversity and landscape benefits. Proposals for new woodland which do not fit this criteria will be assessed for their contribution to Management Plan objectives and comments provided following the principles outlined in this Strategy.

Woodland creation projects will only be supported by the Authority if all relevant constraints have been adequately considered.

“He that plants trees, loves others besides himself”

Thomas Fuller



Statutory tree protection

Trees and woodland of amenity value will be protected through the provisions of the town and country planning acts, principally through the use of Tree Preservation Orders. Planning applications will be assessed for their impacts on trees, and opportunities for increasing tree cover on development sites will be pursued. Where development is proposed adjacent to trees or within woodland the highest standards of arboricultural assessment and mitigation will be expected, meeting or exceeded the recommendations of the relevant British Standard.

The Hedgerow Regulations will be enforced.

Further detail to be found in the Supplementary Planning Document: Design Guide Part 3: Trees and Landscape (currently under review).

Consultations

The Authority provides information and advice in order to help land managers develop proposals that comply with the UKFS and contribute to National Park purposes. The Authority will continue to provide comment to the Forestry Commission forestry and afforestation proposals although it is acknowledged that protected landscapes are no longer statutory consultees for afforestation projects over 5 ha in size.

Review

This Strategy was formally adopted by the National Park Authority on 2 October 2023. It will be reviewed in line with the North York Moors National Park Management Plan which is every 5 years. Tree and woodland targets will be delivered and monitored annually through the Authority's Business Plan.

Policy and guidance

The strategy relates to several key policies and guidance, listed below, but also to the national Joint Accord between Forestry Commission and all National Park Authorities and the 'The Right Tree, Right Place' document endorsed by all National Park Authorities.

- England Trees Action Plan 2021 to 2024.
- The United Kingdom Forestry Standard.
- Keepers of time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England 2022.
- Managing England's woodlands in a climate emergency 2019.
- National Planning Policy Framework.
- North York Moors Local Plan 2020.
- North York Moors Design Guide Part 3: Trees and Landscape.
- Native Woodland Development in the North York Moors and Howardian Hills 2002.

