Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

# Keepers of time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England

## Government's statement on England's ancient and native woodland and ancient and veteran trees

May 2022



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We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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# Foreword

The oldest tree in England is believed to be 2,000 to 3,000 years old. It has lived through much of our recorded history, and borne witness to unprecedented change. In that time it has also provided shade, cleaned our air and water, nurtured our soil and wildlife, and sequestered carbon.

There have been attempts made to value our ancient trees and woodland, and in truth it's not possible to fully and accurately capture the sheer range of benefits they provide. But what we do know is that their value is vast, and too often underappreciated.

Ancient trees and woodlands are a part of our natural heritage and they are simply irreplaceable. They provide unique ecological conditions and support whole ecosystems that cannot be found anywhere else. The presence of Hazel Gloves Fungus for example is a clear indicator of clean air and Atlantic rainforest conditions, a rare and important type of ancient woodland.

This Government has made significant commitments to establish new trees and woodland across the country, but it is no less vital to preserve what we have now. This presents unique challenges, particularly for ancient woodland and veteran trees. In 2005, the Government set out its initial vision for responding to these challenges through the Keepers of time. There has been progress since then in identifying, protecting and restoring these national treasures. However, since then while the nation's appreciation for nature has only grown, so too have historic pressures from climate change to population growth.

That is why we committed to update the Keepers of time policy in the England Trees Action Plan, to ensure that our approach is up to date with the latest threats and opportunities to properly safeguard and restore our ancient woodland. We will seek to increase the extent of native woodland in a way that enhances the connectivity and resilience of ancient woodland, as part of establishing the Nature Recovery Network.

We will improve the ecological condition of ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees, ensuring they are appropriately managed for the long term. We will conserve the rare, threatened or priority species that rely on ancient woodland, such as dormouse and pine marten. We will reduce the pressures on ancient woodland, and ensure they are more resilient to the threats of climate change, pests and disease. And we will value ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees, making sure they are recognised for their natural capital and cultural value, and making an increasing contribution to our health and wellbeing. In this way we can ensure we hand over these irreplaceable habitats in a better state for the next generation.



Lord Goldsmith
Minister of State (Minister for Pacific and the Environment)

# Introduction

Keepers of Time is the Government's policy for ancient and native woodland and ancient and veteran trees in England. This statement updates the policy to recognise the value of ancient and native woodlands and ancient and veteran trees in England. This policy updates the Government's commitment to evaluating the threats that face these habitats. The policy also sets out our principles and objectives to protect and improve these habitats for future generations.

The Government position on the Keepers of time policy has not changed. But it is important to make sure we reference the latest evidence and information available and focus on the most important issues faced today. Therefore, in the England Trees Action Plan 2021, the Government committed to update the Keepers of time policy statement.

Since the Keepers of time policy was published in 2005, there has been significant progress on the protection and improvement of ancient and native woodland, and ancient and veteran trees. Over 27,000 hectares of plantations on ancient woodland sites in England have been brought into restoration since 2010, which has improved their ecological condition. The managing ancient and native woodland practice guide was released in 2010 which provides guidance to help land managers make appropriate management decisions.

The Government increased protection for ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees in the planning system by amending the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012 and again in 2018. The National Planning Policy Framework outlines that development that results in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists.

To support this, Natural England and the Forestry Commission publish advice for making planning decisions that helps local planning authorities make planning decisions that affect ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees.

Since 2006, Natural England and partners have continued to update the Ancient Woodland Inventory. The updated inventory identifies more areas of ancient woodland in England and now includes woodlands smaller than 2 hectares. Woodland Trust also developed the Ancient Tree Inventory to identify and protect notable ancient and veteran trees.

The Woodland Wildlife Toolkit provides advice on managing woodlands for wildlife. In particular, it focuses on rare and declining species that are dependent on woodland habitats. Woodland managers can use this toolkit to assess the current ecological condition of our ancient and native woodlands and identify where we need to focus efforts to improve condition.

While we have made progress on protecting these trees and habitats from loss and improving their ecological condition, there is still more to do. The need to protect and

improve ancient and native woodland and ancient and veteran trees for people, nature, climate and the economy is still as relevant today as it was in 2005.

Throughout this document, when we make reference to ancient woodland we are referring to all habitat types that sit within this category. Unless otherwise stated, this includes:

- ancient semi-natural woodland
- plantations of ancient woodland sites
- ancient wood pasture and parkland
- infilled ancient wood pasture and parkland

# Wider policy context

The England Trees Action Plan 2021 is the Government's long-term vision for trees and woodland. It presents how we will achieve our ambition of planting, protecting, and managing trees to deliver more for society, nature, climate and the economy.

The England Trees Action Plan commits to better protect and increase the resilience of ancient woodlands and ancient and veteran trees. It recognises their cultural and ecological value that has accumulated over hundreds of years. Refreshing this Keepers of time policy document to better reflect current policy and ambition is an important commitment within the England Trees Action Plan.

The Government is also implementing a wider suite of policies and commitments which the Keepers of time policy will help deliver. In turn, these will reinforce the value and importance of ancient and native woodland and ancient and veteran trees.

Protecting and enhancing ancient and native woodland and ancient and veteran trees will contribute to achieving the Government's proposed environmental targets, such as the tree canopy and woodland cover target. Better management of these habitats will also support the climate objectives set out in the Net Zero Strategy 2021 by improving carbon sequestration. It will also help to mitigate the climate adaptation risks outlined in the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2022.

Ancient and native woodlands and ancient and veteran trees are extremely important habitats for biodiversity. Better protection and management will support government ambitions to halt biodiversity loss by 2030. Ancient and native woodland will also form a significant part of the Nature Recovery Networks being established through the 25 Year Environment Plan.

The Environment Act 2021 introduced Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Net Gain. These will support ancient and native woodland and ancient and veteran trees by establishing a co-ordinated approach to landscape level planning within the built environment.

Defra is considering how best to support and incentivise the management of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees and ancient wood pasture in future environmental land management schemes.

Internationally, the UK is a leading voice against deforestation and unsustainable land use and our COP26 Presidency in 2021 drove forward action to protect forests in important biomes. Action to protect domestic woodlands allows us to champion afforestation on the international stage.

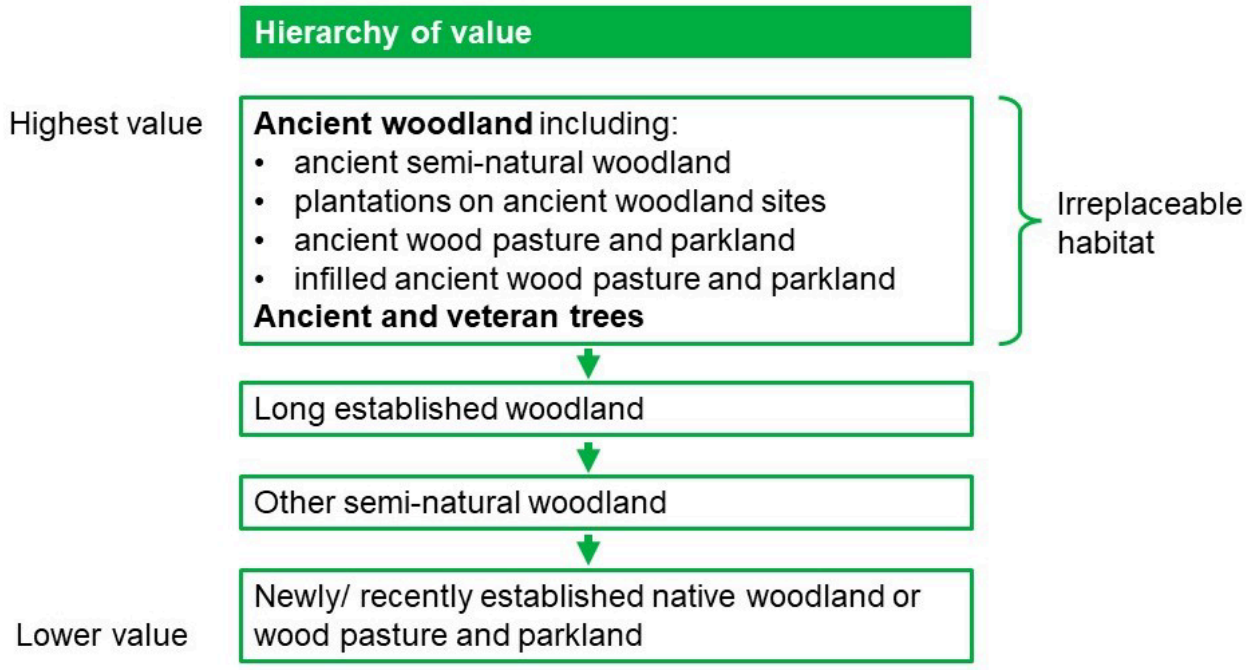
# The value of ancient and native woodlands and ancient and veteran trees

England's ancient and native woodlands and ancient and veteran trees support high levels of biodiversity. They are home to a quarter of England's priority species for conservation. They also deliver many ecosystem services including water and soil regulation, carbon storage, support for people's wellbeing and their long-standing cultural values.

These woodlands can also provide timber and non-timber forest products, contributing to the economy and providing revenue for landowners. Protecting and managing ancient trees and woodlands while expanding and connecting them with new native woodlands is vital. It will maximise the benefits these woodlands give to nature and people and address the biodiversity and climate crises.

## Figure 1 – Hierarchy of value for native trees and woodlands

This is a hierarchy of value for the types of distinct habitat classed as native trees and woodlands. It reflects their contributions to biodiversity richness, cultural heritage and wider ecosystem services.




Our most valuable trees and habitats should receive the greatest protection. Recently established native woodland which, while still important, requires less stringent protection. The position in the hierarchy may inform the appropriate management objectives for each habitat type. A fuller description of each tree or habitat category is given in the glossary.

## Ancient woodlands, ancient wood pastures and parkland, ancient and veteran trees

Ancient woodlands, ancient wood pastures and parkland and ancient and veteran trees are irreplaceable habitats which must be protected. Their long-standing presence, species and form serve as a rich cultural record of past management practices.

Ancient and veteran trees are rich in biodiversity. They provide food, shelter and breeding sites to large numbers of species including birds, bats, fungi and insects, which are often restricted in their distribution. They can be found both inside and outside of woodlands.

### Ancient semi natural woodland and ancient wood pasture and parkland

Many species of wildlife found in ancient semi natural woodland are also poor at colonising recent woodland. These species only survive due to the long continuity of woodland cover and undisturbed soil profiles. Ancient woodlands are also a rich source of genetic diversity, providing a natural seed bank of native species. Many of our best old growth habitats are found in ancient wood pasture and parkland. These represent some of the best ecological continuity in any woodland type as well as being important cultural and landscape features.

Although ancient woodland in England makes up only 28% of all woodland, it holds 38%[6] of all woodland carbon stored in living trees and must not be lost. In addition to the trees, woodland soils are also an important store of carbon. Woodlands will accumulate carbon for hundreds of years and this will continue throughout the lifetime of the trees.

### Plantations on ancient woodland sites and infilled ancient wood pasture and parkland

Restoring ancient woodlands that are ecologically degraded is a high priority for the Government. This includes restoring plantations on ancient woodland sites by gradually transforming stands from non-native planted species to native species.  Infilled ancient wood pasture and parkland could also be restored by removing the trees that have grown up and infilled the gaps between the veteran and ancient trees. Restoration will only be considered by the Forestry Commission where there is historical evidence of ancient wood pasture and parkland being present in the past. This could be open grown ancient and veteran trees and where there will be clear net ecological benefit in restoring infilled ancient wood pasture and parkland.

### Long established woodland

Long established woodland has been present since at least 1893. While not ancient, these woodlands are still very important. They have had many decades to develop rich biodiversity and they often contain important old-growth features and deliver a range of ecosystem services.

### Other semi-natural woodlands

Other semi-natural woodlands are when the woodland is not ancient or long established. Instead, it contains primarily native species with other semi-natural features. For example, deadwood and native ground flora. These woodlands are still important for biodiversity and nature recovery.

### Recently established native woodlands, wood pasture and parkland

Recently established native woodlands or wood pasture and parkland are not yet as valuable as ancient and long-established woodland or other semi-natural woodland. However, these younger native woodlands also contribute to biodiversity and nature recovery as they can become very rich places for nature.  They can develop complex mosaics with open space - providing structures, microhabitats and species that may not be as well represented in older woodlands or wood pastures and parklands. Allowing native trees to naturally regenerate and colonise will help support their adaptation to climate change and enhance ecological resilience.

### Mixed productive woodland

The Government also recognises that well-planned, mixed productive woodland can provide environmental, social and economic benefits. They can also complement our native woodland habitats in the landscape. However, mixed productive woodland is outside the scope of this document.

# Extent of our ancient and native woodlands

## Ancient woodland extent

The total woodland cover in England is 1.3 million hectares, which accounts for around 10.1% of the total land area. Of this, around 914,000 hectares are identified as native woodland which equals 70% of England's woodland.

### Figure 2 - Breakdown for the area of ancient semi natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland sites compared to broadleaf and conifer woodlands in England.

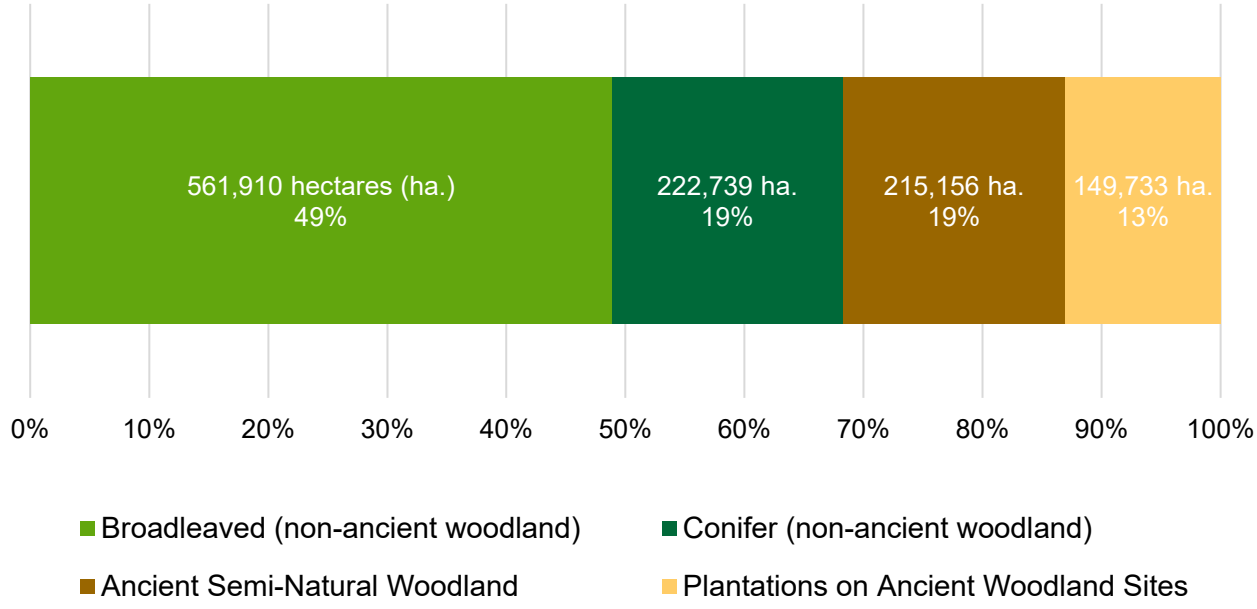



Figure 2 shows the breakdown by area for ancient woodland and other woodlands in England. It compares the areas of:

- ancient semi-natural woodland (215,156ha, 19%)
- plantations on ancient woodland sites (149,733ha, 13%)
- broadleaf woodlands (561,910ha, 49%)
- conifer woodlands (222,739ha, 19%)

We do not yet know the total area of ancient wood pasture and parkland and long-established woodland in England. We aim to identify this by 2024 through:

- the ancient woodland inventory
- the long-established woodland inventory

Within the 149,733 hectares of plantations on ancient woodland sites recorded on the ancient woodland inventory, around half of the woodlands included are native plantations. Natural England is revising this data and many sites previously identified as plantations on ancient woodland sites will be reclassified as ancient semi-natural woodland. This is because they are native woodland plantations or restored ancient woodland.

The combined area of ancient woodlands that are over twenty-five hectares account for 58% of the total ancient woodland resource. However over 70% of the total number of ancient woodlands are less than 5 hectares in size. The small size of these woodlands can lead to a greater risk from threats and lead to deterioration of the resource.

Ancient woodland in England can be identified by using the Ancient Woodland Inventory mapping layer. This data is available on Magic maps and is an essential tool for anyone making decisions or plans that involve or effect ancient woodland. This dataset is not complete and ancient woodland may be present on sites, even if not included on the Ancient Woodland Inventory.

## Ancient and veteran tree extent

It is difficult to calculate the number of ancient and veteran trees that are currently in England. So far, we have recorded over 111,000 trees. We know the full extent of this resource is much greater, but we do not have the data to showcase this. To identify ancient and veteran trees, the most complete record currently available is the Ancient Tree Inventory which is run by the Woodland Trust.

All ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees are irreplaceable, regardless of whether they are present on the Ancient Woodland Inventory or Ancient Tree Inventory.

# Threats

Our ancient and native woodlands and ancient and veteran trees are immensely rich habitats. Highly valued by their owners and users, many are declining or threatened. Sustainable management is key to realising their potential.

Threats to our ancient and native woodlands can be immediate, direct and absolute. For example, loss to infrastructure, development or unauthorised felling of trees. Threats can also be slower and more subtle, for example, climate change, tree diseases, shading from plantations or by invasive species such as rhododendron.

There are also more widespread environmental changes that can threaten woodland and cause deterioration of habitats. For example, diffuse pollution and functional isolation of woodlands from other woodlands and semi-natural habitats as the built environment expands nearby.

## Fragmentation

Many ancient and native woodlands are very small and have become increasingly isolated from other semi-natural habitats. This fragmentation means that if a species disappears from a woodland, there is no nearby source from which it can recolonise. This can also affect ancient and veteran trees. The intensification of agriculture and increased pressure from development over recent decades has exacerbated the effects of isolation. Many of the species associated with our woody habitats are poor dispersers and the current lack of habitat connectivity will lead to them being threatened as their ‘climate space’ moves and changes.

## Development and boundary incursions

Development can threaten ancient and native woodlands. Woodland can suffer loss and deterioration if houses or roads are built too close to it through damage to soils, roots and vegetation, and changes to drainage.

Development can also cause indirect effects including:

- increasing disturbance to wildlife from noise, light pollution and domestic pets
- cutting back of trees and shrubs along the woodland edge
- the expansion of adjoining gardens into the woodland margin

Development also increases the occurrence of other effects listed in this section such as fragmentation and overuse by people.

## Climate Change

The climate is already changing, as evidenced by the advance in budburst dates and other changes in ‘Nature’s calendar’.

Most tree species in England have wide geographic distribution across Europe and will persist in our landscape. Our ancient woodlands are genetically diverse and have a high potential for evolutionary adaptation. This does not mean that climate change will not affect them.

Climate change is likely to effect woody habitats with an increase in:

- winter rainfall
- damage caused by wind
- the frequency and severity of summer drought
- the potential for wildfires.

Milder winters could also see an increase in populations of insect and mammal pests in woodland.

## Damage from grey squirrels, deer and livestock

Unsustainably high populations of wild deer prevent natural regeneration, reduce the understory structural complexity, and impoverish woodland ground flora.

Intensive grazing by livestock can result in the loss of important features and threaten the long-term viability of woods. Heavy trampling can lead to erosion and loss of vegetation that supports biodiversity. Conversely, in ancient wood pasture and parkland settings, low levels of browsing and grazing can help to maintain biodiversity.

Squirrels can threaten trees by stripping bark from stems and branches. The bark-stripped patches can let in disease, leave scars and alter the form of the tree. This can limit the future use of the tree for timber production and can even cause trees to die.

## Inadequate or inappropriate management

Many woodland species are dependent on the structure created by traditional management practices such as coppicing. This plays a fundamental role in maintaining diversity of structure and habitat within ancient woodland.

Economically, this traditional management has not been self-sustaining. This has led to a decline in active woodland management or conversion to other more economically viable forms of management such as single age and single species stands. These management types do not provide rich habitats for biodiversity and species.

Changes to harvesting practices, especially increased mechanisation with heavy machinery, have the potential to increase soil compaction and erosion if not carefully managed.

Ancient and veteran trees, including in wood pasture and parkland, are particularly threatened by:

- inappropriate agricultural management and other land management activities

- soil compaction
- ploughing in the root zone
- agricultural chemicals, including on neighbouring land

Poor tree management such as inappropriate tree cutting (or neglect of pollarding regimes) and removal of deadwood negatively impacts the value of ancient and veteran trees.

## Invasive and non-native plant species

Invasive and non-native species can have detrimental effects on both biodiversity and cultural heritage features in ancient and native woodlands.

Non-native species that are widespread and cast a lot of shade can all but eradicate ground flora. For example, rhododendron and some planted conifers. Other invasive shrub species include cherry laurel, snowberry and gaultheria. Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed can be problematic along watercourses and in wet woodlands.

## Pests and diseases

There is an increasing threat to ancient and native trees and woodland from non-native pests and pathogens. This is partly because of globalisation, including trade in both live plants and in wood products. It is also exacerbated by climate change, which allows some pests and pathogens to do better in the warming climate.

Current pests and diseases causing issues in ancient and native woodlands and to populations of ancient and veteran trees include:

- ash dieback
- acute oak decline
- sweet chestnut blight
- oriental chestnut gall wasp
- oak processionary moth
- several species of *Phytophthora*

The threat these pests and pathogens pose to ancient and native woodland trees is variable and new pests and pathogens may continue to arise.

## Diffuse pollution and air quality

There has been a significant rise in nutrient levels in soils and groundwater in recent decades from agricultural fertilisers and wider atmospheric pollution. This is adversely affecting the flora of our woody habitats, favouring common ‘weedy’ species over the more distinctive woodland plants.

Air pollution, including airborne nutrients and dust particles such as nitrogen, is a serious threat and affects ancient woodlands and ancient and veteran trees. It causes changes in bark chemistry, light levels and the composition of species growing on the bark of these trees, including lichens, mosses and invertebrates that are often rare.

## Inappropriate recreational use

Sensitive habitats, such as ancient woodlands, can suffer when people use them excessively for recreation or inappropriate activities and access is not managed appropriately.

Society benefits from having access to, and recreational use of habitats such as ancient woodland. This high-quality environment stimulates interest in nature as well as offering health and wellbeing benefits, but access needs to be managed appropriately.

Walking, cycling, horses and other vehicles can cause compaction and erosion of the soil and supress ground flora and fauna without suitable access management and support to enable responsible recreation.

Dogs can disturb wildlife and cause enrichment of soils if owners do not remove dog waste.

Removing fallen branches or trees for firewood reduces important deadwood habitats and reduces biodiversity. Anti-social behaviour such as vandalism, littering, arson and fly-tipping can also have negative impacts on the habitat.

# Policy principles and strategic objectives

Our vision for our ancient and native woodlands by 2050 is that ancient and native woodlands, and ancient and veteran trees are:

- appropriately protected
- sustainably managed in a wider landscape context
- providing a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits to society

We have created a set of policy principles and strategic objectives to guide policy development and delivery across government to achieve this vision.

We will work to embed these principles and strategic objectives across future policy in England to make sure the importance of ancient and native woodlands and ancient and veteran trees is recognised. We have identified a number of actions the Government is taking or will take in the short term to achieve this.

## 1. Protection of the resource

Our strategic objectives are to:

- **maintain and enhance the existing area of ancient woodland**
- **conserve and enhance the existing resource of ancient and veteran trees**
- **recognise the value of and protect long-established woodland**

Our main priority is to protect ancient woodland, and ancient and veteran trees from the threats listed in this policy document. We must also recognise the value of long-established woodland and consider options to provide greater protection to these habitats from development

To protect the resource of woodlands and trees the Government will:

1.1. undertake a review of the National Planning Policy Framework to make sure it is correctly implemented for ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees. The Government will also strengthen guidance if needed and consult on stronger wording to better protect ancient woodlands

1.2. require local planning authorities to consult the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities before granting planning permission for developments affecting ancient woodland

1.3. consult on the protections for long-established woodlands in the planning system, recognising their high ecological and societal value

1.4. create a long-established woodland inventory to cover England and help identify these woodlands to inform future protection

1.5. update the Ancient Woodland Inventory to cover the whole of England. This will include mapping smaller ancient woodland sites of 0.25 hectares and introducing a new category for ancient wood pasture and parkland and infilled ancient wood pasture and parkland

## 2. Expansion of the resource

Our strategic objectives are to:

- **increase the net area of native woodland**
- **establish new woodlands, wood pasture and parkland and future veteran trees**
- **provide greater connectivity for habitats and species by encouraging new woodlands near and adjacent to existing resources**

We must increase the total extent of native woodland to deliver our net zero ambitions and support nature recovery in England. We must also enhance the landscape connectivity of these habitats to make sure our woodlands are bigger, better and more connected as part of the Nature Recovery Network. We must also take steps to identify, conserve and enhance future veteran trees as the lack of replacement 'future veterans' is a significant challenge for the future health of this resource.

To expand the resource of woodlands the Government will:

2.1. continue to develop the proposed statutory target to increase tree canopy and woodland cover in England
2.2. work with others to develop the Nature Recovery Network which will support the increase of woodland cover and better connect our ancient and native woodlands and ancient veteran trees in the landscape
2.3. encourage Local Nature Recovery Strategies to expand and connect our ancient and native woodlands
2.4. Implement the requirements of Biodiversity Net Gain and identify opportunities to create and enhance important habitat including native woodlands
2.5. Provide support and incentives for native woodland creation through current and future environmental land management schemes
2.6. Provide support to encourage the identification and protection of future veteran trees through Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier

## 3. Improved ecological condition

Our strategic objective is to **improve and maintain the ecological condition of ancient and native woodland and ancient veteran trees.**

We must improve condition and restore severely degraded sites, such as plantations on ancient woodland sites. This will make sure these habitats do not deteriorate and that appropriate management is encouraged to achieve the greatest outcomes for our ancient and native woodlands and ancient and veteran trees. We recognise there are many barriers to achieving improved ecological condition and we will seek to address these to help land managers improve condition of these valuable trees and habitats.

To improve the ecological condition the Government will:

3.1. provide support and incentives for ancient and native woodland, ancient wood pasture and parkland and ancient and veteran tree management through current schemes
3.2. consider how best to support and incentivise these trees and habitats in future environmental land management schemes
3.3. support work on the ground to improve the condition of ancient semi-natural woodland and to restore plantations on ancient woodland sites while making sure they continue to provide owners with income
3.4. support Forestry England to manage ancient woodland sites across the nation's forests to improve their ecological value and ultimately restore all plantations on ancient woodland sites to resilient native woodland

## 4. Protection and recovery of woodland species

Our strategic objective is that **rare, threatened or Priority species associated with ancient and native woodland and ancient and veteran trees should be conserved, enhanced and where appropriate, reintroduced**.

Without these valuable, connected habitats, many of our priority species, such as dormice and pine martens cannot survive.

To protect and recover woodland wildlife the Government is:

4.1. providing guidance on good practice management for priority species and the reintroduction of species

## 5. Improved resilience

Our strategic objective is to **appropriately manage ancient and native woodland and ancient and veteran trees to make sure they are resilient to the threats of climate change, pests and diseases.**

We must address existing threats, reducing excessive browsing from deer or livestock and impacts from grey squirrels to allow natural regeneration of resilient native species to take place.

We do not know how well these woodlands will adapt to the threats of climate change, including the increased pressures from tree disease. Many of our woodlands do not have diverse species or are not structurally diverse which makes them less resilient to threats. Some of our native woodland species, such as ash, are already suffering from the impacts of tree disease which is affecting their resilience and ability to regenerate. We must therefore encourage greater diversity in these woodlands. It is critical that we closely monitor the ecological condition of our native woodland resource so that we can take appropriate action when there is a need to do so. In the interim, the Government provides practical advice to landowners on ways they can better manage their woodland to combat the effects of climate change.

To improve resilience the Government will:

5.1. publish the Woodland Resilience Implementation Plan by 2024, to inform active management approaches, increase resilience and make sure woodlands will thrive in the future
5.2. publish a Deer management strategy and revised Grey squirrel action plan by the end of 2022 to encourage more effective management of invasive and problem species to reduce external pressures on ecosystems and allow regeneration and adaptation of tree populations
5.3. encourage diversity of species and genotypes, where appropriate in new tree establishment, which may help woods to adapt to changing climatic conditions and reduce the impact and severity of pest and disease outbreaks
5.4. publish the Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain in 2022 to ensure excellent biosecurity practices among landowners and encourage responsible management of pests and diseases to minimise spread and severity of impacts

## 6. Supporting the economy

Our strategic objective is to **sustainably manage ancient and native woodlands and trees, recognise them for their natural capital value and contribution to the economy.**

We want to make sure that our ancient woodlands remain functioning ecosystems as the climate changes and pests and diseases threaten tree species. A portfolio approach to managing ancient and native woodlands should be taken by woodland managers, focussing on:

- the type and associated value of the woodland
- the land managers objectives for the site
- the wider ecological, financial and social impacts of the management

Approaches should be appropriate to the site, ranging from light touch, non-intervention management, to more traditional practices such as coppice management and managing woodlands more commercially for timber and wood products.

To support the economy the Government will:

6.1. increase the recognition of ecosystem services that native woodlands can provide, for example flood alleviation and pollution mitigation, and develop markets for them to encourage private investment in woodland management while safeguarding wildlife and cultural heritage values
6.2. promote the sustainable production of timber and other non-timber woodland products from existing ancient and native woodland

## 7. Supporting health and wellbeing

Our strategic objective is to **support ancient and native woodlands and trees to increase their contribution to our health and wellbeing.**

Many ancient woodlands provide public access, allowing people to make important contact with nature that helps to promote interest in the protection of these habitats, while delivering many health and wellbeing benefits. We encourage the responsible use of these habitats, especially those woodlands close to where people live.

To support health and wellbeing the Government will:

7.1. publish a Woodland access implementation plan. This plan will establish positive behaviours by the public and support landowners to manage their accessible sites to benefit both society and nature

## 8. Protection of cultural heritage

Our strategic objective is to **protect, conserve and enhance the cultural heritage of ancient woodlands and ancient and veteran trees.**

The age of England's ancient woodlands and ancient and veteran trees means they are rich in cultural heritage and hold an important record of historic management practices. They often include valuable historic features which cannot be recreated due to the extensive timescales associated and we must therefore protect them.

To protect cultural heritage the Government will:

8.1. promote good working practices and improve historic data resources to make sure valuable historic features are identified, protected and conserved
8.2. encourage, where possible, the restoration of traditional management practices, such as coppicing and pollarding to conserve, restore and enhance landscape character

## 9. Safeguarding landscape context

Our strategic objective is to **recognise, protect and enhance the value of ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees in our landscape.**

Ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees have been a feature of our landscapes for centuries. They provide an important sense of place and local distinctiveness to landscape character which we must protect. Where activity such as intensive agriculture and development takes place near these habitats, we should consider adequate buffer zones to protect the resource from harm.

To safeguard the landscape the Government will:

9.1. make sure the management and creation of ancient and native woodland conserves and enhances the local distinctiveness and landscape character
9.2. avoid and minimise the effects of intensive land uses such as agriculture and development that are in close proximity to or adjoin ancient or native woodland

# Measuring success

This policy details the direction we must take to improve how England perceives and treats ancient and native woodlands and ancient and veteran trees. Changes within these habitats is likely to be gradual and we hope to see progress towards our vision by 2050 and beyond.

To measure the success of this policy we have noted the outcomes we hope to achieve. We will use these outcomes to monitor progress and assess the success of the policy by reviewing it every 5 years.

We are limited by the data currently available, and we do not yet have sufficient data to measure all the ambitions we set out to achieve in this policy statement. There are more outcomes we would like to monitor but we must work with others to improve the data and metrics available to allow us to do so in the future. For example, we will work with the others to consider whether future iterations of the National Forest Inventory Woodland Ecological Condition Assessment will allow us to better monitor the progress we are making to improve the condition of our ancient and native woodlands.

By 2050 and beyond we will:

- maintain the existing area of ancient woodland
- maintain the existing resource of known ancient and veteran trees, excluding natural losses from disease and death
- identify and introduce appropriate protections for existing areas of long-established woodland
- achieve a net increase in the area of native woodland
- make sure at least 75% of woodland Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in favourable condition by 2042
- improve the condition of the majority of native woodland to make sure they’re either in favourable ecological condition or improving by 2030
- restore or gradually restore the majority of plantations on ancient woodland sites to native woodland by 2030
- sustainably manage deer and squirrel populations to reduce the level of browsing damage in native woodlands
- increase the percentage of ancient and native woodland in active management
- create high genetic and structural diversity of native species in new planting
- reduce the number of designated heritage assets in ancient woodland on the Heritage at Risk register
- increase the number of people who have access to an ancient or native woodland near to where they live

# Glossary

Definitions of different habitat types mentioned in this policy statement.

## Ancient woodland

This is areas of woodland that have been continuously wooded since at least 1600AD.

**Continuously Wooded** – Continuously wooded means it has always been woodland, never cultivated or converted to agricultural use or burned intentionally. This includes woodland that has been periodically felled or coppiced, as long as woodland has been allowed to naturally regenerate or has been replanted.

Ancient woodland includes:

**Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands (ASNW)** - Ancient woodland of mostly native tree species, usually derived from coppice or natural regeneration. ASNW often include old-growth characteristics such as ancient and veteran trees and large diameter standing and fallen deadwood. They are dynamic ecosystems that can include many other habitat types such as species rich grassland, heathland, wetland and freshwater systems.

**Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS**) - Ancient woodland sites that have been converted to plantations dominated by non-native tree-species. These often retain some remnant features characteristic of ASNW such as ground flora along rides or pre-plantation native trees.

**Ancient Wood Pasture and Parkland (AWPP)** - derived from the traditional practice of managing trees in tandem with grazing, characteristically with at least some open grown or pollarded veteran trees or shrubs, old-growth characteristics and diverse and dynamic open and open-wooded habitats.

**Infilled Ancient Wood Pasture and Parkland (IAWPP)** –where the open habitat between open grown or veteran trees in AWPP has infilled, either through natural regeneration or planting, resulting in closed canopy woodland.

## Ancient and veteran trees

These can be individual trees or groups of trees. They are found in ancient woodlands and as trees outside woods.

**Ancient trees** are exceptionally valuable for their biodiversity, cultural and heritage value. They are irreplaceable habitats that can:

- be of a great age relative to others of the same species
- be large, depending on species, site and management history
- have significant decay features such as hollowing and a crown structure typical of old age

- have evidence of past use and management (such as pollarding)

**Veteran trees** may not be very old, but they have significant decay features, such as branch death and hollowing. These features contribute to their biodiversity, cultural and heritage value. They are also considered irreplaceable habitat.

All ancient trees are veteran trees, but not all veteran trees are ancient.

## Long-established woodlands

Woodlands that have been on the Ordnance Survey Epoch 1 Map series since 1893 and have been wooded continuously until today.

All ancient woodland is long established, however not all long-established woodland is ancient

## Other semi-natural woodlands

Woodland that is not ancient or long-established woodland but is composed primarily of native species and has developed other semi-natural features. For example, deadwood and native ground flora derived from, or in combination with, natural colonisation and regeneration, coppice or planting.

## Newly and recently established native woodland or wood pasture and parkland

Woodland or wood pasture and parkland which has been established on previously open ground, and which comprises predominantly native trees and shrubs but has not had time to develop other semi-natural woodland or wood pasture and parkland features. For example - deadwood, native ground flora and old growth features.