

### **Question 1 – What do forests and woods mean to you?**

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) is passionate about woodlands and their associated habitats. Woods mean a great deal to us including their: value for wildlife / relative richness and diversity; relative wildness; value for people to enjoy wildlife, tranquillity and natural beauty; value for the health and welfare of people for spiritual and physical refreshment; value for the historic and cultural heritage; and the ecosystem services they provide.

### **Question 2 – What is your vision for the future of England's forests and woods?**

WWT believes that England's trees and woodland have a vital role to play as part of a coherent landscape scale ecological network for biodiversity - as a key means of adapting to climate change and a source of well-being for society. WWT has a vision for a vibrant, thriving and healthy landscape which includes a sustainable network of trees and woodlands providing a range of goods, services and experiences for people and society. We wish to see enhanced areas of natural style woodland and a larger, more sustainable, connected and resilient woodland resource. Woods need to play a greater role in the lives of local communities. The Trust is particularly keen to see landscape scale approaches to woodland conservation and management which make sense in ecological terms. In Warwickshire, for example, the Trust is working to promote this approach in the Princethorpe Woodlands, which incorporates some sites managed by the Forestry Commission. It is important that investment is maintained in these woodlands to manage them and to use them as an educational resource and as exemplars of good management.

### **Question 3**

a) In most of Warwickshire, the Trust strongly supports the expansion of woodland cover and land use so long as it is not at the expense of existing habitats or landscapes with value for other nature conservation or environmental attributes. There is a need for a coherent and integrated approach to rural land-use policy and the expansion of woodland needs to be achieved in a transparent and rational way that identifies where best new tree cover should be established to avoid damage to other valued sites – or indeed other important land-uses. An approach to Woodland Opportunity mapping has been trialled by the Trust with Coventry City Council in 2010/11 - assessing relative suitability of sites for potential Woodland creation. The Trust advocates that a similar approach is adopted to assess which areas of land are suitable for tree planting.

b) Forests and woods may be of benefit to society as a part of the natural environment. Regrettably the legacy of forestry and woodland policy has included damage to valued woodlands and their associated open spaces, landscapes and habitats. The common benefits of the natural environment to society are complex and may not be readily summarised here.

c) Forests and woods are a part of the natural environment and as such contribute to the multiple benefits of a diverse natural environment. There are circumstances where there are significant benefits to wildlife from habitats with a high tree cover. In lowland counties, such as our own, the priorities are well established and focus on old growth pasture woodland and working ancient coppiced woodland. These two priorities have been severely damaged by the combination of inappropriate plantation forestry and the related diversion of public investment away from managing woodlands. There is a need for new and innovative ways of managing semi-natural broadleaved woodlands to generate high quality timber and woodland products in woods where it is not possible or desirable to restore coppice or pasture woodland. As a local voluntary membership organisation, the Wildlife Trust has over 40 years of experience as a participant in civil society. The Trust strongly supports the engagement of people in the management and stewardship of their local woods. We are convinced that the responsibility for caring for nature is not just the job of the State but a mixed approach is required borne out of a partnership between the state, private, local communities and voluntary sectors.

d) As an owner and manager of a number of important woodlands, WWT understands the difficulty in securing a reasonable return from woodland enterprises. In most cases it is state intervention, in the form of grants, subsidies, tax breaks or artificially controlling the supply to materials to the market, that determines the financial decisions of woodland managers.

### **Question 4.**

On many occasions the Forestry Authority have exercised their role as a regulator to safeguard important areas of woodland in Warwickshire from destruction or abuse – which has been a hugely important role which should continue. Private woodland owners have also benefited from high quality advice from specialist Forestry Commission (FC) officers. This advice can lead to public

financial support through well directed Woodland Grant / agri-environment schemes. The Trust has benefited from such advice and support as have neighbouring private estates. The management of public funds requires the close engagement of public servants and there remains a case for advice to be free at the point of delivery where that advice is likely to result in public benefits.

### **Question 5 – What do you see as the priorities and challenges for policy about England’s forests and woods?**

The challenge for the Government is to genuinely integrate the delivery of multiple public and societal benefits – e.g. biodiversity, adaptation to climate change, access, historic environment and landscape conservation – into the creation and delivery of forestry policy. This needs to be a policy for all of England’s trees and woodland, on public and private land, including the management of the Public Forest Estate. Currently forest and woodland policy is still inadequately integrated with other aspects of rural land-use policy. The recent Lawton Review and Natural Environment White Paper highlight the need for much more joined up thinking about how the State manages its own land, regulates and distributes public money. The discussions and uncertainties over the future of the public forest estate needs to be resolved as a priority and WWT supports the role of the State in owning and managing land for the benefit of the public. We also believe that the public forest estate should be viewed holistically as a part of the wider publically owned land holdings. The Trust has in the past purchased nature reserves from the FC and there would seem to be no ideological reasons why carefully considered and managed disposals should not be acceptable given the right safeguards and resources. The key issue in delegating management of public land to a third party is to ensure that public interests and benefits are secured in perpetuity.

#### **5a Protection and restoration of the native woodland resource**

WWT considers the following issues to be priorities for English forestry policy and its effective delivery:

- Protection, restoration, and expansion of the native woodland resource. Retaining and protecting all native woodland with semi-natural characteristics and reversing the fragmentation of the landscape is vital. Without this basic approach to improving the resource, regardless of how it is managed, woodland species will continue to decline.
- Restoration of native woodland on ancient woodland sites currently covered with plantation forests is the only way to increase the extent and quality of ancient semi-natural woodland. The English Public Forest Estate, managed by FCEngland, is a key PAWS resource that requires a strategic and concerted approach to restoration. Restoration of non-native conifer PAWS should be achieved as a priority.
- The importance and cultural significance of woodland cover of all types to the quality of landscapes should be recognised through spatial planning policy, alongside other important semi-natural habitats. In particular, recognition should be granted to ancient woods, PAWS, woodlands supporting very localised priority species<sup>1</sup> and assemblages of veteran trees.

#### **The Government needs to:**

- Provide new and strengthened forms of protection for all ancient and semi-natural woodland sites, particularly through the new planning framework.
- Commit to restore **all** 35,000 hectares of planted ancient woods in their ownership/ management and facilitate restoration off the Public Forest Estate.
- Improve the biological condition of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority native woodland habitats, associated priority species and designated sites.
- Ensure that historic environment features and designated sites within all woodlands are recorded and managed in good condition.
- Radically expand the area of native style woodland at a landscape scale and develop a network of connected woodlands by focussing effort on reconnecting fragmented woods.

#### **5b Open habitat restoration**

Forestry has a critical role to play in meeting Government aspirations for non-woodland habitats, such as semi-natural grassland and lowland heathland. Inappropriate afforestation has had a direct adverse impact and continues to damage neighbouring non-woodland habitats – and this should be halted immediately. Government now has a policy for re-creating and restoring open habitats from conifer plantation but delivery is weak and unsatisfactory. This policy must be ambitiously delivered if Gov is to meet its existing commitments to safeguard this asset and its associated biodiversity, amenity and cultural value for future generations. FC England manages the largest area of un-restored lowland

heathland still under forestry and this should be restored and not continue to be restocked with conifers.

**The Government needs to:**

Agree an ambitious national target with FC and Natural England to deliver the open habitats policy both on and off the Public Forest Estate and develop delivery mechanisms that overcome barriers to the implementation of open habitat policy.

**5c An increase in appropriate management of native woodland**

There is strong evidence that a lack of woodland management and the resulting decrease in structural diversity and loss of woodland features is linked to the dramatic declines observed in many species of birds, plants, amphibians and insects. With evidence-based targeting, appropriate safeguards and the provision of management support and guidance, more and better wood management could see increases in rare and threatened wildlife associated with native woods and open habitats. WWT strongly supports an increase in the amount of appropriate management. WWT acknowledges the differing objectives of a multitude of public, voluntary sector and private woodland owners – the task of Government is to ensure that biodiversity objectives are embedded in national forestry policy and delivery mechanisms, such as English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) and agri-environment schemes.

WWT recognises the importance of economic activities, including the development of markets and supply chains, as well as grant support, to drive woodland management that could benefit priority species and habitats and other public goods. The critical test is that management interventions, e.g. to harvest woodfuel, are founded on principles of sustainable forest management. Different forms of management will be appropriate in different places, and important micro and mosaic habitats within woods must receive special consideration. Management regimes should also encompass the conservation of evidence of the woodland's history as well as earlier archaeological sites which may also be present within the woodland. The UK Forestry Standard and its association guidelines is Government's minimum approach to sustainable forestry, but policy must go beyond this basic standard.

There is a need to be better informed – and to have a more 'intelligence-led' and sensitive approach to the way we manage woodland accounting for the special character of locally distinctive woods or landscapes. There has been too much unintentional damage to special features in the name of permitted woodland management. At the same time, being over-precious brings its own issues - it's about being well-informed in what you do.

**The Government needs to:**

- Ensure Government grants and advice target delivery for priority species, habitats and other public benefits, including those for which no markets currently exist.
- Support the development of local markets for produce. This should also help integrate woodland management into existing land management businesses to drive sustainable woodland management for public benefits.
- Provide encouragement to owners to go beyond the UK Forestry Standard minimum to realise public benefits and Government's own biodiversity commitments and encourage more owners and managers of small and/ or low-intensity managed native woods to become certified under the voluntary UK Woodland Assurance Standard by removing current barriers – and ensure that to the English state forest continues to be certified.

**5d Sustainable woodland expansion**

WWT strongly supports the principle of expanding woodland cover and the creation of new woodland habitat to benefit woodland wildlife, especially where expansion is targeted around ancient woodland where it can be buffered and extended to create more resilient woodland landscapes that are able to cope with climate change impacts. WWT also strongly supports the creation of new woods for people who have insufficient existing access to woodland, especially in urban areas where woods and trees perform vital functions for health and well-being. Any expansion must be undertaken using the principle "the right tree in the right place" to maximise benefits and avoid damage to existing biodiversity, landscape, water, archaeology and other public benefits including public access; any expansion should be viewed at a landscape scale, in order to increase connectivity at the broadest scale. Mistakes of the past, such as planting on important open habitats, **must** not be repeated.

**The Government needs to:**

Provide the right mix of legislation, regulation, facilitation, advice and grant support to encourage a significant increase of the right trees in the right places, whilst preventing planting in the wrong places.

### **5e Maintaining and enhancing public access for leisure & recreation**

The social and environmental benefits of access to our forests and woodlands are currently valued at £1.2 billion per annum, with recreational visits valued at £484 million per annum.<sup>2</sup> Recreational opportunities are important and public access should be increased in an environmentally sustainable manner, allowing the public to access and explore as freely as possible, whilst at the same time avoiding disturbance to sensitive wildlife species and habitats, protecting historic features while offering opportunities for environmental education, interpretation and enjoyment of the natural environment. There must be a national objective of increasing access to all woodland and all those areas currently receiving Government grants or other public monies should be dedicated as access land as a condition of the grant where access is not yet provided. If public money is used then the widest public benefit should be gained, and for woodlands this should include public access.

#### **The Government needs to:**

Clarify the key role for woodlands and forests in delivering the aspirations and targets in the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper about reconnecting people with nature. Provide encouragement, information, interpretation, advice and support, and help in removing barriers to private woodland owners wanting to improve woodland access. We need to ensure that public access is maintained and enhanced to all of our forest and woodland, with a national objective of increasing access in appropriate ways to all woodland.

### **5f Support research & information gathering**

WWT believes that continued research, survey and monitoring are needed to ensure that forestry and woodland policies are properly informed. This should include information on the extent and condition of priority habitats, as well as afforested semi-natural habitats, and the permeability of neighbouring land. There is a major gap at the moment in that a substantial, if not an overwhelming proportion, of the biodiversity in woodlands is not adequately recorded, surveyed or assessed. There needs to be a real effort to secure decent resources and/or partnerships to survey all aspects of woodland biodiversity, especially for those groups such as invertebrates, fungi or lower plants that might have no English name but constitute the greater part of woodland biodiversity and often include rare and characteristic species that make a wood special e.g. aspen-associated insect communities, wet-woodland communities, special fungus communities. Continued improvements in the knowledge about the causes of priority species declines, priority habitat changes and needs and dispersal abilities of key woodland species is vital to enable effective management of the existing resource and improved spatial targeting of woodland creation.

#### **The Government needs to:**

- Monitor and report on the effectiveness of forestry policy in delivering Government priorities for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, public access, the historic environment, landscape conservation, and other ecosystem services.
- Continue to support research and solution testing into priority species declines, climate change adaptation and mitigation, tree diseases and ecosystem service delivery by woods and forests.

### **5g Public Forest Estate**

WWT believes that the Public Forest Estate is a vital national asset, providing highly valued access to and reconnection with nature for the public. Public ownership should continue to be an important element in the ownership mix for forests and woodlands, and the Public Forest Estate should be the exemplar for the delivery of all the public benefits outlined above.

---

<sup>2</sup> UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) *UK National Ecosystem Assessment*, UK NEA, Cambridge (<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>).