

The Northern Forest

It's in your
nature



Trees play a fundamental role in the landscape, for both people and biodiversity. They provide freedom for our wildlife to roam, and spaces for us to explore, relax and play. Our natural environment also provides us with many services and is not simply 'nice to have'; it's essential to life on Earth.

From the tallest tree to the smallest organism, biodiversity encompasses everything that's alive on our planet. If we lose biodiversity, we lose food, water, fresh air.¹ Protecting it is not a choice. We need to conserve, enhance and create the conditions for ecosystems to thrive and to continue to deliver the essential 'life support' systems that society needs.

The Northern Forest is a partnership of:



Manchester
City of Trees



THE MERSEY
FOREST
more from trees



WOODLAND
TRUST

Today's decisions, tomorrow's world



Conservation is something that's been taken seriously in the UK for many years. We were the first country to produce a national biodiversity action plan and considerable progress has been made over the last century to protect wildlife. Conservation organisations have helped to stimulate popular interest and secure Government support, culminating in laws for designating places that are special for wildlife and people.

Despite this, nature is in trouble and losing habitats means losing species. Wildlife is under pressure from a variety of stresses; habitat loss, climate change, pests and diseases, invasive non-native species and unsympathetic land management. In 2016 the State of Nature report² assessed the current status of the species of highest conservation concern in Great Britain. Of the 8000 species assessed 15% are extinct or threatened with extinction. The situation is so severe that it could lead to the extinction of many species. If we're not careful, this could be the start of a dangerous trend.

The decisions we make today will have an impact for generations to come. It's important we get it right.

The ecological value of woodland is a given. Whether in ancient woodland or a city park, the presence of trees has a huge impact on biodiversity. Ancient woodland is a rare and irreplaceable habitat with a vast value for wildlife. In the UK as a whole, only 2% of our land area supports this unique habitat, with roughly 3% of England's total (7,700ha) found in the Northern Forest.³ This threatened

habitat is under pressure from development, habitat loss and fragmentation, inappropriate management, including intensive grazing levels, pest and diseases and invasive species to name but a few.

Urban areas are also tremendously important. A study in Merseyside found that the amount of green spaces – and particularly trees – such as parks, gardens and cemeteries, had the greatest influence on an area's ecology.⁴ If there's more space for nature, there will be room for species that need our help.

Natural connections

In 2010, the Government published its Making Space for Nature report, which concluded that a step-change in nature conservation is urgently needed. And it's not just about creating isolated pockets of high quality green space and habitats; we need to work at the landscape scale. There's a need for connectivity; to overcome fragmentation and create the 'stepping stones' between trees, parks and forests.

A report from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) stated that the **single biggest threat to European butterflies was habitat loss**



With 75% of the UK land managed for agriculture it's also about managing these areas in a nature friendly way. When created, these ecological networks provide diverse habitats and linkages for an array of species, allowing them to move through the landscape and survive current and future pressures.⁵ Climate change is already impacting our native wildlife and this approach will help give species greater space and opportunity to withstand those pressures. In the Northern Forest, it's about creating a bigger, better and more connected landscape for wildlife and people.

The concept of natural corridors is tried and tested. When Birmingham developed its wildlife conservation strategy back in 1997, it was built around the notion of corridors. In London, the South East London Green Chain links 300 open spaces over 40 miles.⁶ The Northern Forest can do the same, albeit on a much larger scale across the North of England.

Creating these ecological networks will also provide even more connections between people and nature. The opportunity to be in, and connect with, our natural environment leads to happier and healthier communities.⁷

Natural capital matters

As outlined in the Governments 2016 Conservation Strategy, there is a real desire to find an approach that will help save wildlife and provide a wealth of benefits to people. It's an approach known as 'natural capital', defined as 'the elements of nature that produce value (directly and indirectly) to people, such as the stock of forests, rivers, land, minerals and oceans'.⁸ Of course, we already have a wealth of natural capital in England including our National Parks, forests, city and country parks, farmland and woodland.

But, our natural capital is under pressure. An extra nine million people living in England by 2040⁹, and increased demand for new housing, facilities and infrastructure will undoubtedly take

its toll on our habitats, ecosystems and biodiversity. Of course, the services that our natural capital provides – clean air, water, food, fuel, medicines and resources – will also be in much higher demand.

This concept of natural capital could be a powerful tool that can help us all understand everything that we get from the natural world. It puts environmental planning at the heart of decision-making, recognising that enhancing the quantity, quality, location and accessibility of natural capital can be good for investment, well-being and sense of place.¹⁰ Crucially, it's about long-term planning rather than the 'quick fixes', with the emphasis firmly on the added value of a healthy natural environment, both now and in the future.

The aptly-named Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) are key to this. Bringing together organisations, businesses and individuals from a whole range of sectors, they are charged by government to put the environment at the very heart of decision-making. That means taking a strategic, long-term view of opportunities and challenges. It means planning and managing the natural environment for the benefit of people, nature and the economy.

The Northern Forest supports this approach, and will play a critical role; a large-scale, cross-country woodland creation programme that sets out to enhance the economy, environment and quality of life in the north of England. It's a long-term vision that brings together many partners to secure social, economic and environmental benefits.

As Making Space for Nature states: "The essence of what needs to be done to enhance the resilience and coherence of England's ecological network can be summarised in four words: more, bigger, better and joined." Quite simply, in applying this approach we will create and conserve the natural capital that is fundamental to all human life.¹¹

Enter, the Northern Forest...

The time to create a Northern Forest is now.

If you would like to get involved in delivering the Northern Forest – whether as a financial supporter, landowner, partner, or in any other way – please visit thenorthernforest.org.uk

Join us



Footnotes

- 1 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2011). Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69446/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf
- 2 <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/stateofnature2016/>
- 3 Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland Area Derived from AWI V3.8 – Calculated April 2018
- 4 Whitford, V., Ennos, A. R. and Handley, J. F. (2001). 'City form and natural process' – Indicators for the ecological performance of urban areas and their application to Merseyside, UK. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 57(2): 91–103. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roland_Ennos/publication/223220702_City_form_and_natural_process_-_Indicators_for_the_ecological_performance_of_urban_areas_and_their_application_to_Merseyside_UK/links/59da02e70f7e9b12b36d7a36/City-form-and-natural-process-Indicators-for-the-ecological-performance-of-urban-areas-and-their-application-to-Merseyside-UK.pdf
- 5 Lawton, J. H. et al (2010). Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network. A report to Defra. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402170324/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>
- 6 Davies et al (2011) The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Technical Report ch10. UNEP-WCMC Cambridge. Available at: <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=JxblLfackg%3D&tabid=82>
- 7 Dobbs, C., Kendal, D. and Nitschke, C. R. (2014). Multiple ecosystem services and disservices of the urban forest establishing their connections with landscape structure and sociodemographics. *Ecological Indicators* 43: 44–55.
- 8 Natural Capital Committee (2013). State of Natural Capital Report: Towards a framework for measurement and valuation: 10. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516707/ncc-state-natural-capital-first-report.pdf
- 9 Office for National Statistics (2015). National Population Projections: 2014-based Statistical Bulletin. Available at: www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2015-10-29
- 10 UK NEA (2011). The UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Synthesis of the Key Findings. Available at: <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>
- 11 Natural Capital Committee (2017). Improving Natural Capital: An assessment of progress. Fourth report to the Economic Affairs Committee. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-capital-committees-fourth-state-of-natural-capital-report