



More and Better Woods Action Plan

2022

Executive Summary

Foreword

From its river valleys to its parks and streets, Gateshead boasts an extensive and rich diversity of treescapes. The essential role trees and woodland play in regulating the climate and helping to sustain the natural world is surely more apparent now than at any time in our history. And yet despite this, our trees and woodland face mounting pressures that threaten the fundamental role they play in our society.

This action plan comes at a critical time and serves as a commitment by Gateshead Council to take a leading role in the protection, restoration, enhancement and positive management of the borough's existing treescapes, and to place tree planting and woodland creation at the very centre of our activities to tackle the effects of climate change, restore biodiversity, support economic growth and provide an attractive and healthy environment in which everyone can thrive.

Councillor John McElroy
Lead Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport

Vision

This action plan sets out the Council's vision for More and Better Woods in Gateshead based on the six core themes of:

- Our Woods
- Carbon Woods
- Wild Woods
- Working Woods
- Living Woods
- More Woods

By 2050 the Council aims to have supported the creation of 250ha of new woodland. By 2025 the Council aims to have brought its existing woodland estate into positive, long-term sustainable management. This will provide the following key outcomes:

- increased carbon sequestration and delivery of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures
- valuable, diverse and resilient ecosystems
- positive contribution to green economy
- new and improved areas for recreation and leisure

This Action Plan forms the basis of the Council's woodland creation strategy for the next 10 years and identifies methods to better manage and utilise the Council's existing woodland resource. This will help in addressing the sequestration of local authority carbon emissions, while providing a resilient landscape that will benefit biodiversity and deliver additional environmental and socio-economic benefits.

Our Woods

This Action Plan identifies the need for and benefits of informed woodland management, and frames priorities for the type and location of new woodland planting that will bring best benefit.

Current woodland cover within the borough is approximately 2,200ha. The Council owns approximately 900ha of this.

A new 'whole estate' Woodland Management Plan will be produced setting out clear aims and objectives for the Council's woodlands, taking into account the following strategic themes:

- Climate change
- Biodiversity
- People

Landscape, the Historic Environment, Soils and Water are cross cutting themes.

Carbon Woods

Woodland creation is a key tool in meeting the Council's ambition of Net Zero.

New woodlands can be planted or created through natural colonisation with the objective of carbon sequestration.

The use of fossil fuels, agricultural intensification and accelerated deforestation has driven climate change.

Rising temperatures, rising sea levels, changes in precipitation and water availability are affecting our environment.

These changes are increasing abiotic and biotic stresses on our ecosystems and habitats, including trees and woodlands.

Creating new woodland to help lock up carbon is a key priority of this Action Plan. This follows the guiding principles of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan 2021.

New woodlands should be created to maximise the opportunity to sequester carbon, without compromising the objectives of increasing biodiversity and recreational amenity. Registration on the Woodland Carbon Code allows the sequestration values of new woodlands to be independently verified and valued.

Wild Woods

Gateshead's woodlands are rich in wildlife and support complex communities of plants, fungi, insects and other microorganisms

Ancient woodland is woodland that has persisted for over 400 years. It is the richest and most complex terrestrial habitat in the UK and home to more threatened species than any other.

Plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) are ancient woods that have been felled and replanted with non-native tree species, typically conifers. The restoration of PAWS can deliver significant benefits for people and wildlife; and is considered a conservation priority.

There are approximately 190ha of ancient woodland and 870ha of PAWS in Gateshead. This constitutes over half the total ancient woodland resource in Tyne & Wear.

Woodlands also provide a range of ecosystem services essential to humans:

- climate regulation
- carbon sequestration
- clean air and water
- flood mitigation
- soil protection
- natural pollination
- mental and physical wellbeing

The protection, restoration, enhancement and positive management of Gateshead's existing woodland and the creation of well-designed new woodland is essential in maximising the benefits of woodland for people and wildlife.

Working Woods

The management of existing woodlands and the creation of new woodlands can be done under multi-purpose objectives where productivity can and indeed should be considered.

This can be achieved at different scales, from the large-scale production of timber for construction and other sawn wood products, to the design of new woodlands to include an element of future productivity for local timber markets such as wood-fuel and fencing or more specialist coppice products and non-timber forest products.

Woodland creation and management offers employment opportunities. As more woodlands are brought into management and created, a growing and skilled workforce will be required.

NB Forestry England currently manages approximately 700ha of commercial forestry in Gateshead.

Living Woods

Access to woodland is known to improve mental and physical wellbeing and improve quality of life. The visual prominence of woodland can create a balance between the built and natural environment and help to soften industrial landscapes, especially in urban areas. They also provide cultural and social benefits.

New woodlands should be designed with proximity to people and access in mind. Woodlands that are in close proximity to centres of population provide an opportunity for people to enjoy regular contact with nature and undertake physical activity in quiet, attractive and restful environments.

Woodlands can provide venues for social activity. This can be through their use for education, training and volunteering, local events or just family and friends getting together for exercise or picnics.

This action plan notes the importance of early engagement of local communities in the process of woodland creation and management.

The Historic Environment (HE) is culturally important and existing woodlands are often important places for historic and archaeological features. The creation of new woodland and management of existing woodland must consider the HE and take account of the historical and cultural values of the landscape. Steps should be taken to ensure any historic features, which may be affected by woodland creation and management, are known and evaluated, consulting with and taking advice from local historic environment authorities

More Woods

Woodland currently covers approx. 15% (2,200ha) of the total area of the borough (14,500ha). This compares favourably with the average for England (10%). The Council has committed to supporting a net increase in woodland cover of 2% (250ha) by 2050 in line with the independent Climate Change Committee's recommendation .

This Action Plan identifies a 'short list' of Council owned sites that could be explored further as to their potential to support woodland creation. Approximately 150ha have been identified for further analysis. These sites have the potential to support woodland creation meeting the UKFS themes of biodiversity, climate change, historic environment, landscape, people, soil and water.

The Council and its partners will work with private landowners and other stakeholders to identify another minimum 100ha in order to meet the 250ha target.