ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Improving the contribution that trees and woodlands provide for our natural, built and historic environment.

Image: Woodfall Wild Images – Courtesy of National Urban Forestry Unit

10

Natural and Cultural Environmental Benefits (NCEB)

It is widely recognised that woodland and forestry can help prevent flooding and reduce flood risk to land and property, improve air quality, help prevent global warming, mitigate the effects of climate change and contribute to enhancing rural and urban landscapes.

Addressing these major issues at regional level is a significant challenge for the woodland and forestry sector. Woodland and forestry is a core component of the region's natural, built and historic environment, and contributes to cultural identity through historical association, art, leisure and recreation. Trees, woodlands, parklands, hedgerows, street trees and wooded open spaces are integral elements of local character and perceived environmental quality.
An additional challenge for the region is to improve the link between these benefits and other sectors and activities through vehicles such as the Regional Cultural Strategy or as guided by the Regional Sustainable Development Framework.

Aims:

- To gain a better understanding of the significance of woodland and forestry to the region's identity at regional and sub-regional level.
- To set out the role and contribution of the West Midlands in solving woodland- and forestry-related global and national environmental issues, including climate change.
- To encourage regional policy and practice to support global and national policy, while prioritising the enhancement of the West Midlands region's environment and culture.

ACTION

Delivering the vision

Objectives	Actions
NCEB 1 To include woodland and forestry issues in the Regional Cultural Strategy	• Investigate and articulate the place of woodland and forestry in the historic and modern cultures of the region.
NCEB 2 To clarify and develop the role and effectiveness of trees and woodland in reducing flood risk and in flood management	• Develop catchment flood management plans for the region and use these to inform the contribution of forestry to land use and management strategies.
NCEB 3 To promote actively the significance of woodland and forestry to landscape, historic, biodiversity and other environmental assets and designations; to research the contribution of the West Midlands to global and national environmental targets; and to develop the woodland and forestry sector's environmental targets for wood and paper sourcing, transport, waste and access	• Contribute to the review of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework. • Set and monitor environmental performance targets for the woodland and forestry sector.
NCEB 4 To develop the woodland and forestry sector's contribution to sustainable development	• Promote the use of codes of good land-management practice and certification to help meet sustainable development targets. • Help woodland managers through the certification process. • Assist the understanding of the impacts of climate change in relation to woodlands and formulate appropriate responses and actions, including ways in which woodlands and forestry can ameliorate the effects of climate change. • Encourage the woodland and forestry sector to integrate economic, social and environmental aims in its activities. • Support further research into the value of trees to the urban environment, and develop and promote good practice.

Objectives	Actions
NCEB 5 To clarify the contribution of the woodland and forestry sector to air quality both nationally and locally.	● Identify the regional contribution to Public Service Agreement targets and the Regional Sustainable Development Framework, and encourage the use of trees as an indicator of health of the environment. ● Increase tree cover in urban environments. ● Promote and increase utilisation of carbon credits.
NCEB 6 To maintain soil quality and prevent soil erosion, reduce flood risk, protect water quality and conserve water resources through appropriate woodland creation and management	● Promote and target woodland planting and management on appropriate agricultural land as a farm diversification option, and in urban situations, help regeneration. ● Seek to manage and create wet woodlands to assist flood management and enhance biodiversity. ● Promote good land-management practice that protects woodland and forestry assets and environmental benefits in accordance with codes of good agricultural and woodland and forestry practice, including deployment of the Environmental Stewardship Scheme.

CASE STUDIES

Black Country Urban Forest

The Black Country, north-west of Birmingham, is a region that was badly scarred by more than 150 years of heavy industry and mineral working.

Image: National Urban Forestry Unit

In the mid-1980s, a partnership of the four local authorities of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, key non-governmental organisations and government agencies resolved to "turn the Black Country green."

The Black Country Urban Forest was begun in earnest in the early 1990s, and the award of a £3.75 million Lottery grant in 1995 gave a great boost to the initiative. The National Urban Forestry Unit, based in Wolverhampton, took the lead and, over the following five years, almost 1,000 small woods were planted or brought back into active management, and the landscape of the Black Country began to improve dramatically.

The Black Country Urban Forest has become an influential national and international role model for the way in which trees and woods can contribute to sustainability in urban areas. It has also improved the quality of life for a great many people who live and work in the West Midlands.

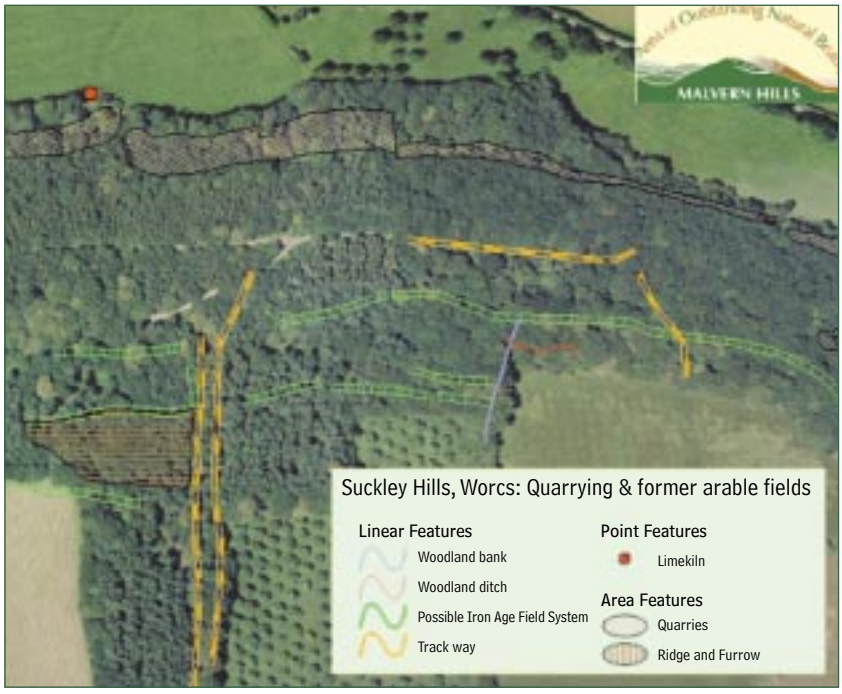
Archaeology beneath the canopy: a survey of the Malvern Hills woodlands.

Woodland owners on the slopes of the Malvern Hills are benefiting from a rapid survey of archaeological features.

New woodland discoveries include prehistoric boundary banks and field systems, purpose-built rabbit warrens, numerous limekilns and charcoal platforms. Owners seeking grant funding are informed of sites on their land and how best to conserve this wealth of evidence of the changing landscape and the activities of past communities.

Managers of Ravenshill Nature Reserve in Worcestershire were amazed to hear their 'ancient' woodland was actually cultivated in mediaeval and possibly Iron Age times. The ridges and furrows of this arable field can be 'felt' as you walk through the woodland ground flora!

The survey findings are already influencing the management of the site. Intensive coppicing allows the features to be seen on the ground, while a thick oak canopy is being encouraged to suppress brambles and scrub. Schoolchildren visiting the Reserve now learn about the change from arable land to woodland, how and why it came about.



Archaeological survey shows the waxing and waning of the woodland edge, and provides management advice to landowners.
Image: Worcestershire County Council