



WOODLAND COVER

Protecting, managing and enhancing existing woodlands and targeting woodland creation.

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Woodland Cover (WC)

The region's landscape reflects its history, identity and economic development.

There are significant forests and important ancient woodlands, but the majority of the region is characterised by a mosaic of smaller woodlands – often scattered and fragmented – small copses, orchards, hedgerows and individual, often veteran trees. There is potential for a significant increase in tree and woodland cover, which is also a requirement of the Regional Spatial Strategy, but this increasingly needs to be carefully targeted, and balanced against the need for stewardship, management and utilisation of existing trees and woodlands. If the current trend for reduced management continues, long-term decline of woodlands may result. The process of landscape-scale change should be guided by the Regional Spatial Strategy and the application of landscape character assessment (which is well developed but not fully understood). This must be consistently applied and informed by other character based studies and combined into one map of the region. Successful landscape characterisation depends on the involvement of landowners and managers together with local communities, which in turn requires resources.

Aims:

- To inform and encourage development of woodlands using landscape character assessment tools at landscape and site scales to enhance diversity and local distinctiveness.
- To protect, manage and enhance existing trees and woodlands.
- To create new woodlands (urban and rural) and develop associated targeting.
- To use trees and woodlands to enhance local distinctiveness and sense of place.

ACTION

Delivering the vision

Objectives	Actions
WC 1 To increase significantly regional woodland cover, linked to the Regional Spatial Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Framework stakeholders to develop as a priority a woodland opportunities map to help target woodland creation.
WC 2 To collaborate in developing more precise targeting for woodland creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop regional and local plans (within the new planning system) that build on the woodland opportunities map and include woodland-creation opportunities at a landscape scale for both rural and urban areas. This should include strategies for green space and increasing the stock and health of urban trees.
WC 3 To develop the landscape characterisation process, mapping the character of woodlands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Complete character assessments for the whole region. ● Apply assessments to new woodland and woodland management with a standardised and streamlined system. ● Develop a training programme on character assessment and historic landscape characterisation. ● Develop a succession plan for landscape features such as veteran trees.
WC 4 To raise the profile of trees and woodlands in relation to the historic environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To increase awareness of the historic environment value of trees and woodland through active support by agencies, and develop a programme of protection and management. ● Promote and support an improved knowledge base of historic environment assets, and develop appropriate training and management skills.
WC 5 To promote actively the contribution that woodland and forestry makes to the culture of those living in the West Midlands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use communication opportunities offered by the regional offices and partner bodies.
WC 6 To promote woodland and forestry in support of regeneration and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include policy and action in Community Strategies, regeneration initiatives, the new Local Development Documents and associated Area Action Plans to secure an appropriate increase in woodland cover on brownfield sites and other land. ● Use landscape character assessment, including biodiversity and historic environment knowledge, to inform plans, strategies and regeneration initiatives. ● Ensure continued support and development of the National Forest, the Forest of Mercia and the Black Country Urban Forest, and apply the lessons learned to new programmes and projects such as Green Arc and New Leaf. ● Realise the potential for creating woodlands along transport corridors.

CASE STUDY

The strategic application of landscape character to woodland cover in Staffordshire

The landscape, biological and historical resources of Staffordshire are rich and diverse. Throughout the county's history, changes in agriculture, industry and the environment have had a profound and lasting influence over the landscape and its environmental assets.

Most counties have produced landscape character assessments and strategies that will be used to inform development proposals; in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan 1996-2011, the 'character approach' to landscape protection and restoration was adopted. The Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Structure Plan – Planning for Landscape Change – contains detailed descriptions of all 22 landscape character types that occur in the nine Regional Character Areas found within the Plan area. Each of the detailed descriptions of landscape character types in the guidance indicates the potential value of new woodland within that landscape, and provides guidelines on location and design.

In response to the England Forestry Strategy (EFS), the Guidance includes, in Appendix 2, A Strategic Statement on Preferred Areas for Woodland Initiatives – a series of seven maps that indicate areas to which, in the view of the Strategic Planning Authorities, resources would be best targeted to deliver the EFS's objectives. While some of the maps are a direct response to the EFS, others drew heavily on work that was carried out for the preparation of an Indicative Forestry Strategy (IFS) for Staffordshire. A Discussion Paper on this work was published and put out to public consultation in 1995, but work on the IFS was curtailed by changes to the arrangements for local authority consultations on forestry proposals. The landscape assessment work undertaken for the IFS did however provide the foundation for the Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Image: Staffordshire County Council

