



Living & Working
Trees, Woodlands and Forestry

5. Policy Framework - Trees, Woodlands and Forestry

5.8 Trees, Woodlands and Forestry

Background

5.8.1 Trees have become synonymous with nature, sustainability and the health of the environment. They are an important component of landscape character and a valuable biodiversity resource. Woodlands also provide recreational opportunities and these wider benefits are reflected in a more multi-functional approach to forestry, reflected in the England Forestry Strategy.

5.8.2 Throughout much of the last century, the Forestry Commission aimed for self-sufficiency in timber, resulting in the creation of large plantations. More recently, the influence of world markets, a strong pound and a loss of markets for low-grade timber have led to a decline in the economic value of woodlands in the UK.



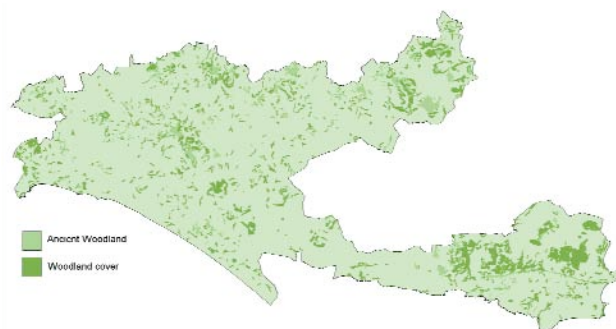
The post-war drive for self-sufficiency resulted in the creation of large plantations.

5.8.3 In Dorset, disease, gales and droughts have all added to the pressure on an ageing tree population. The woodland management practices that have maintained our native woodlands for centuries are often no longer economic and revised management policies such as continuous cover forestry are likely to be better suited to woodland management of today. An inability to resource the effective and economic management of existing woodlands reduces support for creating new woodlands where they could provide benefits.

5.8.4 There appears to be a contradiction between an increasing understanding and appreciation for trees and their role in maintaining the landscape and environment, and their decreasing economic value.

5.8.5 At 10%, the Dorset AONB has a greater woodland cover than the national average of 8.2%. However, this is partly made up of afforested heathlands in Purbeck, some of which might be better cleared for heathland restoration.

5.8.6 Extensive areas of broadleaved woodland are relatively scarce in the AONB, but a significant band of ancient semi-natural woodlands does occur, running south west to north east. These ancient semi natural woodlands, (totalling 2.85% of the AONB), together with more recently created parklands and smaller plantings, are important components of the landscape. They are ecologically important and form a key consideration in the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy. Many small woods have been planted for field sports and this has a strong influence on their management which could provide greater benefits to overall biodiversity.



Woodland Cover in the Dorset AONB.

5.8.7 Individual trees are also important in the landscape. For example, the hedgerow oaks and field maples of the Marshwood Vale are a strong element of the character of that landscape. Veteran trees are often ecologically important and many have become part of the identity of an area, some associated with local tales and legends.

5.8.8 Despite the pressures facing trees and woodlands, many small woods have recently been planted. It is crucial that tree species are appropriate to the area in which they are planted, if the full landscape, biodiversity and amenity benefits are to be realised. Given the long cycle of trees and woodlands, what we do or do not do now will greatly influence the quality of the environment that we hand on to the next generation.

Current Trends

5.8.9 The principle of multi-purpose forestry is well established, which encompasses landscape improvement, biodiversity, recreation and pollution amelioration in addition to timber production. Grant schemes offered by the Forestry

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Commission reflect these aims. Continuous cover forestry is also more heavily promoted, moving away from clear-felling regimes.

5.8.10 There is an increasing recognition of the priority need to restore semi-natural ancient woodlands, including development of new Forestry Commission policy for plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS).

5.8.11 Falling timber prices and the reduction of traditional practices such as coppicing have left many woods in a poor state of management. However, there has recently been a resurgence of interest in small-scale production of wood products, through the Dorset Coppice Group and others and high quality hard wood production is achieved by some estates.

5.8.12 A programme of removal of conifers for the purpose of heathland restoration is being agreed, a small percentage of which is in the AONB.



Hurdle making.

Key Issues

5.8.13 The main issues affecting trees, woodlands and forestry in the Dorset AONB include:

- Climate change and its potential impacts are poorly considered in woodland management and planting.
- Lack of promotion of species that can be grown economically in Dorset and the South West resulting in a lack of local sourcing of timber.
- Hedgerow management is an expensive element of land management often not essential to modern farming.
- Decline in skill base within forest industry.
- Continued loss of ancient woodland nationally due to development, replanting and land management policy.
- Timber and other woodland products are very vulnerable to cheaper imports and the value fluctuates markedly.
- Woodland management is often not economical viable.

- Native woodlands have declined as a result of lack of management and introduction of more economically viable species, with a resultant loss of woodland wildlife.
- Woodland habitat has become fragmented, reducing its wildlife value and making management less economic.
- Lack of information and local strategy for trees and woodland.
- The proven amenity and environmental benefits of woodlands and forestry do not generate a sufficient income to sustain them.
- The value of forestry as an integral part of other sectors of the economy such as tourism, materials and energy is poorly understood and not well represented in policy.
- Lack of processing capacity, necessitating haulage and additional costs, inhibiting the development of local markets.
- Inappropriate trees in inappropriate places reduce local character, damage habitats and reduce support for woodland expansion.
- Links between timber production, processing and sale are poor.
- Poor communication and working links between forestry management and game management particularly in respect of deer populations.
- Local and regional planning policy does not strongly promote the benefits of multi-purpose forestry.
- The grant support system needs to be better integrated to make multiple benefits more achievable.
- Lack of skills and integrated training.
- Poor public understanding of woodland management practices and confusion over products and accreditation schemes.

Key Opportunities

5.8.14 The main opportunities for trees, woodlands and forestry include:

- Bio-fuel production could boost the industry.
- Greater recognition of wider benefits of forest management could provide new opportunities and resources.
- Demonstration of woodland management more appropriate to scale of woodlands in the Dorset AONB and to economic potential is a key element of sustainable woodlands.
- Improved marketing and accreditation of local wood products could help support management.

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Current Activity

5.8.15 There are a number of initiatives underway, including:

- **Regional Guidance.** A Regional expression of the England Forest Strategy is being produced by the Forestry Commission. The SW England Woodland and Forestry Economic Strategy gives a useful perspective regarding the economic value of multi purpose woodlands and makes recommendations.
- **Accreditation.** The Forestry Commission accreditation scheme is enabling a market share to be gained for products sustainably produced and increasing the sustainable management of woodlands.
- **Grants.** The Forestry Commission provides grants under the Woodland Grant and Woodland Improvement Grant schemes which are under review to better reflect current priorities. Small-scale tree planting on farms can be funded through Countryside Stewardship and some local authorities provide small grants for tree work.
- **Innovation.** There are a number of initiatives countrywide which could provide models for use in Dorset AONB.
- **Local Wood Products.** The Dorset Coppice Group and others produce local wood products such as charcoal and promote them in the local area. Direct from Dorset is a local accreditation scheme that helps promote these products. Logpile.com is a web site that provides information on local wood suppliers and has some Dorset producers listed.
- **Advice.** The Forestry Commission provides advice to woodland managers in relation to its grant schemes. Dorset Wildlife Trust provides advice to owners of woodlands that are Sites of Nature Conservation Interest.
- **Management.** Many woodlands are in the ownership of Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust, National Trust and Dorset Wildlife Trust and are being managed to provide multiple benefits to wildlife and people.

Related Policies and Strategies

5.8.16 Related strategies, documents and policies include:

- *'England Forestry - A new Focus for England's Woodlands'* (Forestry Commission, 1999)
- South West England Forestry and Woodland Strategic Economic Strategy (Forestry Commission & Regional Development Agency, 2002)

- 'South West Regional Planning Conference - Regional Strategy' (SWRA,2000)
- *'Sustainable Forestry: The UK Programme'* (HMSO, 1994)
- *'Certification Standard for the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme'* (UKWAS, 2000)
- *'UK Forest Partnership for Action'* (Forestry Commission, 2002)
- *'Space for Nature: Landscape-Scale Action for Woodland Biodiversity'* (Woodland Trust, 2002)
- *'National Inventory of Woodland and Trees; England-Regional Report for South West'* (Forestry Commission, 2002)
- *'Dorset Ancient Woodland Inventory'* (English Nature, 1998)
- *'Dorset Inventory of Ancient Woodland'* (English Nature research report, 2001)
- *'The Status and Distribution of Ancient Woodland in Dorset'* (Pengelly & Heath, English Nature, 2003)
- Review of English Woodland Strategy (HMSO, 1994)

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Policy Aims

- Encourage and promote sustainable multi-purpose forestry and woodland in the AONB.
- Identify opportunities for the implementation of national and regional woodland and forestry strategies including an increase in tree cover as guided by landscape character.
- Increase awareness of the contribution that trees, woodlands and forests can make in conserving and enhancing natural beauty and character in the AONB, supporting biodiversity and our enjoyment and quality of life.

Policy Objectives

- W1. Development of an integrated, sustainable, strategic tree, hedgerow, woodland and forest programme for Dorset AONB and surrounding area.
- W2. Help ensure that tree and woodland management and planting is appropriate to the landscape character and in keeping with wider AONB policy objectives, by development of strategy and guidance.
- W3. Facilitate woodland management and planting to restore and link ancient semi natural woodlands and thereby reverse the erosion of this habitat and its dependent species.
- W4. Develop and encourage regional timber, wood use and wood product markets and supply networks.
- W5. Demonstrate and encourage the amenity, recreation, biodiversity, landscape, pollution amelioration and energy budget benefits of woodlands and forestry.
- W6. Develop a woodland creation programme to include assessment, explanation, description, consultation and implementation mechanisms.
- W7. Conserve and enhance floodplain woodlands, orchards and parkland trees.
- W8. Identify training needs and work with training providers to improve the skill base for woodland and forestry management.