

Planning Policy

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To: Planning Policy
Subject: Local Plan

Local Plans and ancient woodland – Forestry Commission approach

The Forestry Commission is not in a position to input into the consultation process for Local Plans. However, the information below is provided to assist you in assessing the appropriateness of sites for future development, and to highlight opportunities for achieving your renewable energy obligations.

A summary of Government policy on ancient woodland

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (published October 2006).

Section 40 – “Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”.

National Planning Policy Framework (published March 2012).

Paragraph 118 – “planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss”.

National Planning Practice Guidance – Natural Environment Guidance. (Published March 2014)

This Guidance supports the implementation and interpretation of the National Planning Policy Framework. This section outlines the Forestry Commission’s role as a **non-statutory consultee** on “*development proposals that contain or are likely to affect Ancient Semi-Natural woodlands or Plantations on Ancient Woodlands Sites (PAWS) (as defined and recorded in Natural England’s Ancient Woodland inventory), including proposals where any part of the development site is within 500 metres of an ancient semi-natural woodland or ancient replanted woodland, and where the development would involve erecting new buildings, or extending the footprint of existing buildings*”

It notes that **ancient woodland is an irreplaceable habitat**, and that, in planning decisions, **Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) should be treated equally in terms of the protection afforded to ancient woodland in the National Planning Policy Framework**. It highlights the Ancient Woodland Inventory as a way to find out if a woodland is ancient.

Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees. (Published April 2014)

The Forestry Commission has prepared joint **standing advice** with Natural England on ancient woodland and veteran trees which we refer you to in the first instance. This advice is a material consideration for planning decisions across England. It explains the definition of ancient woodland, its importance, ways to identify it and the policies that relevant to it. It also provides advice on how to protect ancient woodland when dealing with planning applications that may affect ancient woodland. It also considers ancient wood-pasture and veteran trees.

The Standing Advice website will provide you with links to Natural England’s Ancient Woodland Inventory, **assessment guides** and other tools to assist you in assessing potential impacts. The assessment guides sets out a series of questions to help planners assess the impact of the proposed development on the ancient woodland. **Case Decisions** demonstrates how certain previous planning decisions have taken planning policy into account when considering the impact of proposed developments on ancient woodland. These documents can be found on our website.

The UK Forestry Standard (3rd edition published November 2011).

Page 24 "Areas of woodland are material considerations in the planning process and may be protected in local authority Area Plans. These plans pay particular attention to woods listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory and areas identified as Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLENClS).

Keepers of Time – A Statement of Policy for England’s Ancient and Native Woodland (published June 2005).

Page 10 "The existing area of ancient woodland should be maintained and there should be a net increase in the area of native woodland".

Natural Environment White Paper "The Natural Choice" (published June 2011)

Paragraph 2.53 - This has a "renewed commitment to conserving and restoring ancient woodlands".

Paragraph 2.56 – "The Government is committed to providing appropriate protection to ancient woodlands and to more restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites".

Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem services (published August 2011).

Paragraph 2.16 - Further commitments to protect ancient woodland and to continue restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

Renewable & low carbon energy

The resilience of existing and new woodland is a key theme of the Forestry Commission’s work to Protect, Improve and Expand woodland in England we will continue to work with Forestry / Woodland owners, agents, contractors and other Stakeholders to highlight and identify, pests and diseases and to work in partnership to enable Woodlands and Forests are resilient to the impacts of Climate Change.

Woodfuel and timber supplies continues to be an opportunity for local market growth whilst also enabling woodlands to be brought back into active management.

Flood risk

The planting of new riparian and floodplain woodland, can help to reduce diffuse pollution, protect river morphology, moderate stream temperature and aid flood risk management, as well as meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets for the restoration and expansion of wet woodland.

The Forestry Commission is keen to work in partnership with Woodland / Forest Stakeholders to develop opportunities for woodland creation to deliver these objectives highlighted above.

In the wider planning context the Forestry Commission encourages local authorities to consider the role of trees in delivering planning objectives as part of a wider integrated landscape approach. For instance through:

- the inclusion of green infrastructure (including trees and woodland) in and around new development; and
- the use of locally sourced wood in construction and as a sustainable, carbon lean fuel.

Yours sincerely,

Forestry Commission, South East and London Area Office

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