

The Woodland Trust – Written evidence (NTB0007)

About us

1. As the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, the Woodland Trust aims to protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future. We own over 1,000 sites across the UK, covering over 33,000 hectares and have over 500,000 members and supporters. We are an evidence-led organisation, using existing policy and our conservation and planning expertise to assess the impacts of development on ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees and ensure their protection within local and national planning policy.

How can we ensure that new towns and expanded settlements are delivered to a high-quality standard that go beyond minimum expectations for construction and demonstrates best practice for sustainability, aesthetics and place-making?

2. In aiming to deliver 1.5 million new homes over this Parliament, the government has an opportunity to embed strong principles for sustainable development and ensure that nature is at the heart of new towns.
3. Urban trees and woodlands bring numerous practical benefits for communities, the environment, and wildlife. Growing evidence shows that urban trees reduce heat risk, lessen flood risk, improve air quality, create habitats for wildlife, provide access to recreational space, and improve mental and physical health.
4. There are four main principles that the Trust would like to see the government adopt to ensure that sustainability, equity, aesthetics, and place-making are at the core of all new settlements.

Retaining existing trees and woods and boosting tree equity:

5. Embedding the principle of equitable access to trees and woods into new communities. Trees and woods deliver a range of benefits: improving air quality, storing carbon, urban cooling, improving mental health and wellbeing, providing homes for nature and protecting communities from flooding. Protecting the existing tree resource within new town locations will also help to quickly establish a sense of place, provide key focal points, and promote access to nature. Each new town should include a minimum 20% BNG, alongside demonstrable increases in tree canopy cover. The ambition should be to achieve 30% canopy cover in new developments as part of their design.

Protecting our irreplaceable woodlands:

6. Ancient woodlands (AWs) and trees are irreplaceable habitats, which need careful visitor management and robust buffering from residential development to ensure they thrive as they become part of the story of new towns. Development pressure can lead to significant long-term deterioration without suitable mitigation, and therefore a minimum 100 metre buffer should be used at SEA and outline planning stages, with reduction down to no less than 50 metre buffer zones at detailed design stage for ancient woodlands. These woodlands and their buffers should be integrated

and designed as part of wider green infrastructure strategies and coherently connected to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy – will allow them to support people and nature long into the future.

Integrating important trees (AVTs) into developments:

7. Our world-renowned population of ancient and veteran trees (AVTs) – where located in new town areas – will need integration into design planning, proactive sensitive management and suitable protection from development proposals. Such trees should be considered an asset from the outset- with development designed sensitively around appropriate root protection areas free of disturbance - to protect them and allow their story to continue with new residents, bringing nature and history to their doorsteps.

Providing for trees in perpetuity:

8. Development corporations and/or their contracted management companies should create long term management schedules for new tree planting, existing woodlands and street trees, with reliable funding mechanisms. Each new town should have a dedicated tree and woodland strategy, which builds on any existing Local Authority/Strategic Authority-wide strategy and also feeds into the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

9 July 202