Forestry Commission

Perceptions of Landscape Change
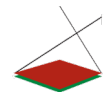## Final Research Report
March 2022

theresearchbox

Contents

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a rapid qualitative insight project conducted with members of the public in Winter 2022:
- to examine perceptions of landscape change with regard to woodland: existing and future creation
- in three study areas: Durham County, The National Forest, and Exmoor
- using six online focus groups, three in-person creative sessions and nine ethnographic videos and associated interviews.

The research was commissioned to give more detail on the public's views of various design principles, in the light of the Government's Tree Action Plan. To this end a number of visuals were used to show the potential progression of change in the landscape, with increased tree cover.

The public often think that the countryside 'manages itself' and are often unable to point to change in the landscape. Only in the National Forest, where new woodland creation is seen as beneficial and is well communicated, were concepts of large-scale change more readily understood.   In most places, what is often cited as 'change' is:
- historic change, deforestation from previous civilisations
- post WW2 changes in farming & forestry
- local felling of trees for timber production.

Tackling climate change was felt to be a high priority, as was the need for carbon capture as a way of reaching 'Net Zero'. However, the link with tree planting was not always top of mind. This purpose for planting could be reinforced, as it is currently a very close second to:
- imagined wildlife benefits
- improved biodiversity
- prevention of species loss.

Once the connection was fully realised, people were very supportive of increased tree planting, as long as it was done strategically and in keeping with the landscape. This often meant imposing conditions, such as:
- following the contours of the land
- respecting landscape character
- using a variety of species, ideally native trees (there was reaction against 'new' species)
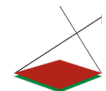
- avoiding 'square' or 'blocky' plantations
- keeping certain features or landforms visible
- avoiding hilltops
- avoiding moorland
- avoiding farmland with small field patterns
- creating green corridors
- linking up existing woodland
- having a 'visual flow'
- using rewilding
- being mindful of existing carbon sinks, such as peat bogs, moorland and unimproved grassland.

Younger respondents generally tended to impose fewer conditions about increased tree cover, especially on farmland. Respondents in the National Forest were also generally keener on new woodland creation, having experienced beneficial change in recent memory. Local communication, such as positioning new trees as a 'farm' for carbon capture, went some way to alleviating concerns about visual appearance (and non-access issues).

Places considered best for new woodland creation were:
- in coombes, clefts between hills, 'nooks and crannies'
- on moorland fringes
- along existing field margins, to thicken hedgerows or existing hedge lines
- as small copses or single trees in the middle of pasture, for animal shelter
- on the edge of towns and villages
- on some flat land, although respecting open vistas
- on old industrial sites and other sites of regeneration.

In summary, people loved their woodland, expressing all sorts of benefits. They had a variety of favourite places for different uses. As long as this continues, they would be very satisfied. Further research is suggested to consolidate the sample and gain more depth about perceptions of specific change and access, as well as gaining more insight into avenues for engagement.
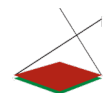
1.0   Introduction

1.1   Background

The Forestry Commission (and the UK in general) is embarking on a significant programme of tree planting, following its Tree Action Plan, the policy being squarely in line with agreed objectives on Nature Recovery, Climate Action and Biodiversity.

A strong body of work supports the existence of people's connection to nature but how in particular will they be affected if the landscapes they use begin to change in appearance visually? In order to ensure that there is sufficient engagement from the public, there is a need to explore how people may or may not react to a change in their landscape experiences over time, as a result of woodland creation.

To this end there needs to be an appreciation of what is currently valued about woodland visually and experientially. Does the environmental benefit of increased woodland trump any concerns or is there a balance to be struck between that and keeping the landscape's identity? The Research Box was commissioned to a

assist planners in the design process, giving shape and guidance to the implementation of current policy goals.

1.2   Objectives

The objectives for the overall project, taken from within the ITT, were to:

- explore how **people** engage with woodlands and trees; investigating motivations and barriers
- explore perceptions of landscape change per se and with regard to woodland & forestry
- explore how woodland design can deliver woodland & forestry projects with the widest support across society
- test various design strategies and engagement methods to expand tree and woodland cover and bring woodland into active management.

The Research Box carried out the study over the winter of 2022.
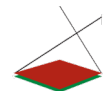
2.0   Study Approach

2.1   Methodology

A literature review of previous research was conducted (see Appendix A). Qualitative research was used with 3 different methods (see below).

The reason for using qualitative research was threefold:
- first, to delve into the emotional aspects of the landscape journey
- second, to harness people's creativity and stimulate their forward-thinking capacity with regard to future landscape change and specifically woodland cover
- finally, to enable the unrestricted use of visual stimulus and digital interactivity.

Desk Research

Short literature review of past research projects

6 Online Focus Groups
- Early in programme
- 2 per area
- General population
- Basic demographics

3 Creativity Sessions
- Later in programme
- One per area
- More engaged, integrated landscape users
- Greater use of visual designs
- In-person

9 Individual Ethnographic Depths
- Over the whole period of the programme
- 3 per area
- Site-based walk/experience
- Video diary
- Subsequent online interview

Online Focus Groups

Six online focus groups were conducted with people from across the area and the online method enabled us to get good coverage of different residential locations within or with access to the three catchment areas.

These groups were 1½ hours in length, recorded and contained six people, with the discussion led by an experienced moderator.

Creative Sessions

A more detailed approach was taken in the creative sessions to bottom out the issues and give greater detail. These were two-hour sessions, also recorded. Such in-person groups allow for greater creativity and were held in hotel venues during March, after Covid restrictions had been lifted.

Ethnographic video diaries and depths

In tandem with the other methodologies, nine people (three per area) were recruited to conduct a woodland walk or look at some woodland as an immersive experience. This was to help further examine the first objective of the ITT:

> "to explore how people engage with woodlands and trees."

A two-stage process occurred.

(1) People were asked to take a self-directed walk, or walks, and record these with video clips. A short brief was given beforehand, including asking them to take a video of themselves in their homes, then going to look at some woodlands locally within the study areas

(2) they were subsequently interviewed online to ask about the location of the woodlands, to ask any questions about what they had decided to show in their videos. Then the respondent completed their tree planting game.

Pen portraits of participants are included in Appendix B.

Where permission was given, their videos are available on request.
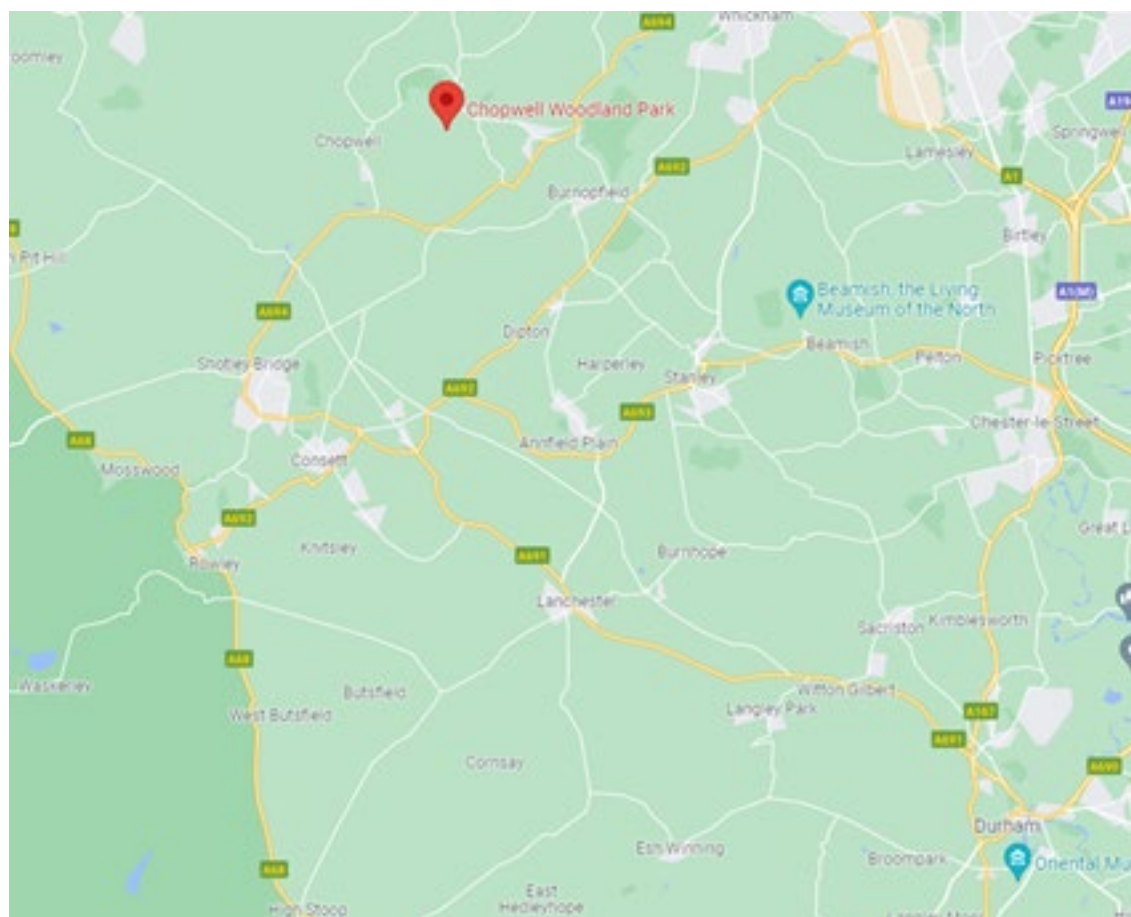
2.2   Study Areas

Three study areas were chosen but due to timing and resources of local teams, it was decided that the approach would be generic with reference to the different areas, rather than individual case studies.

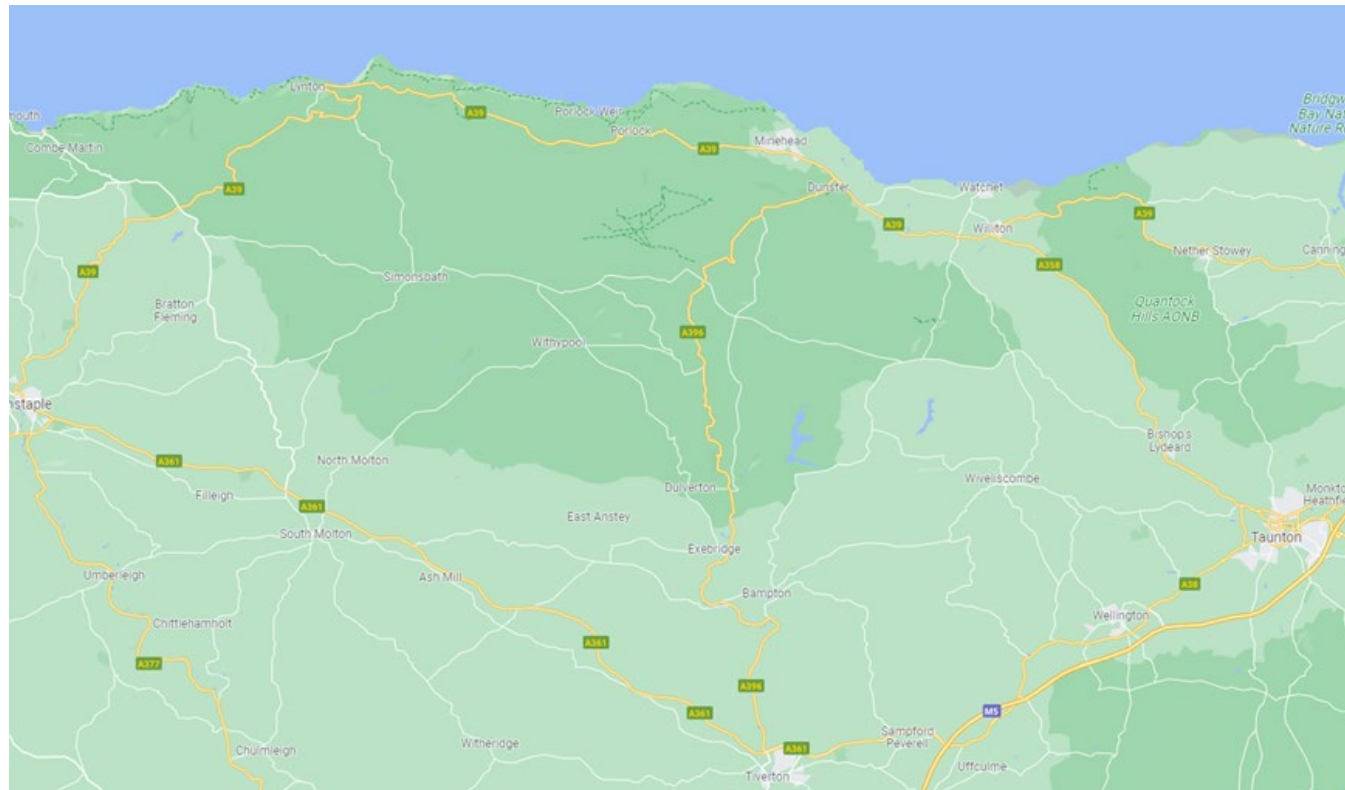Recruitment focused on finding people within these catchment areas:

National Forest:
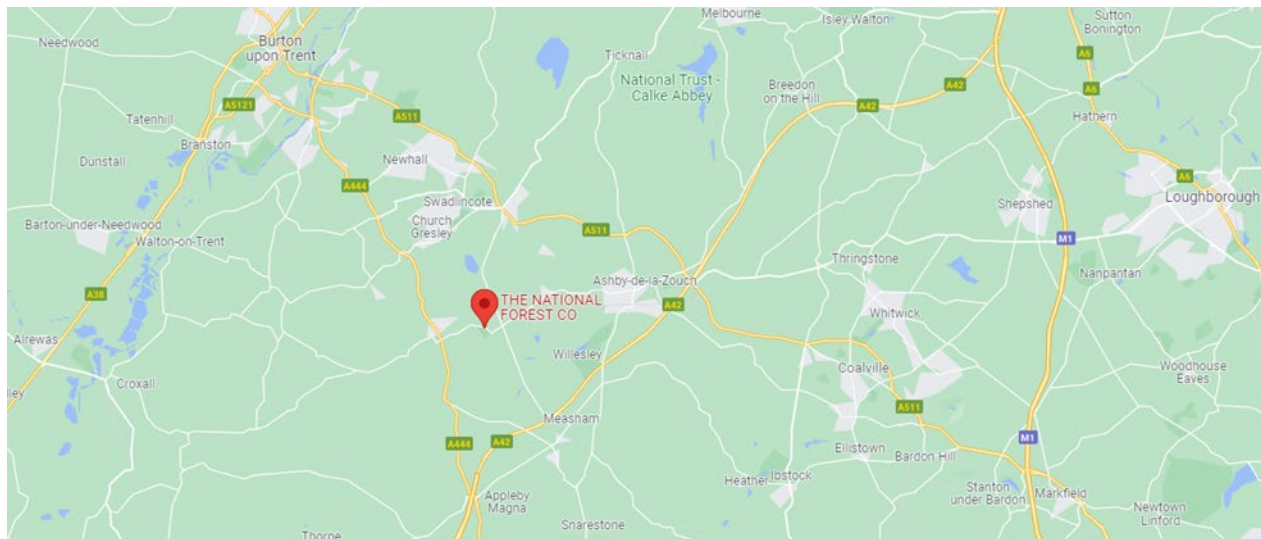
Durham:

Exmoor:

2.3   Research Sample

Participants were found by experienced recruiters directed by The Research Box to follow Market Research Society guidelines at the time of the fieldwork. The overall sample for the project is shown in Appendix C. The research sample is sufficient enough for a qualitative study to give a good initial picture of the study objectives.

Older and a younger people were put in separate groups following other studies and our own experience of landscape attitudes being different between generations. This did prove to be the case with many generation differences being exhibited

Other demographics were covered using a detailed recruitment questionnaire. This was administered as with the other methodologies by accredited local recruiters who use online, on-street and phone methods to find and screen for appropriate people. Certain professions were screened out such as journalism or forestry.

There was a spread of:

- basic demographics (age, lifestage etc)
- attitudinal segments (eg 'experience seekers' or socially motivated)
- usage types, active/inactive, sport/leisure, dog walkers
- BAME, ability levels.

The sample is not big enough to allow for much of a breakdown of attitudes by different demographics. We recommend further research below to allow for more detail on an emerging segmentation.

Respondents were all users of the countryside and woodlands and, because of this, the research is not fully representative of the English population – they were people 'in the market' for trees and woodland. It was decided that urban planting was not to be included in this project but 'peri-urban' was included. For this reason, the sample was a third town dwellers, a third village dwellers and a third from rural communities. All people taking part in the research had to use or reside in the catchment areas above.

N.B A note from the sponsors: The views contained in this report are collected by sampling members of the public and do not necessarily represent the views of the Forestry Commission. We recognise that future woodland applications would be made by individual landowners who would all have their own objectives for planting. This study makes an assumption that these applications taken together have a cumulative 'landscape impact' which merits evaluation. This study looks at that accumulation of individual schemes over time. The inclusion of the National Forest area is useful as it represents a landscape that has undergone significant woodland creation over twenty-five years (200 square miles of new woodland).

2.4   Research Content

When designing the focus group content, a 'funnel technique' was adopted, to allow for a natural flow in the discussion. The discussions started with general topics and then became more specific as the group carried on.

A full discussion guide was devised in partnership with the client project team (see Appendix D). The following topics were questions taken from the original ITT:

- How do communities perceive change on a landscape scale (woodland creation)?
- How important are issues of **quality through woodland design:** variety vs simplicity, naturalistic/organic vs manmade/geometric, openness vs a sense of enclosure
- Do people notice 'poor' examples and appreciate good examples of woodland design?
- Does species choice influence their thinking?
- Are they really simply satisfied with what is there?
- Do they perceive change?
- How important is management of woodland (for example, the impact of thinning or felling of woodland) to the perceptions?
- What is the public appetite for novel types of planting? Eg the concept of novel species (Wellingtonia, Paulownia, Eucalyptus)
- How important are drivers such as climate change to the perception of change?

- What are their influences (Countryfile, National Trust membership, Jeremy Clarkson)?

Stimulus Material

Forestry Commission supplied many visual images with photomontages, stills and visualisations. Many of these are included in the report to illustrate the findings.

Techniques

As well as the examination of visual images: a number of techniques and creative exercises were conducted, including

- prioritisation, order-ranking of lists in the discussion guide
- tree planting drawings (online groups)
  - respondents were asked to draw a curve to represent a hill, then populate with trees or not
- tree planting games for landscapes with different characteristics (moorland x 2, field pattern, valley, river, fen)
  - in the creative sessions by sketching trees onto a landscape view, or not
  - in the online post-video diary/ethnographic interviews, by dragging and dropping tree graphics into landscape view, or not.

2.5   Research Analysis

The Swanwick [1] definition of perceptions was used for this study:

"Perception is concerned with both sensual (usually visual) responses to landscape and with the way that people attach meaning and value to it. "

The focus groups were analysed by experienced qualitative research professionals using 'grounded theory' approaches. This entails:
- developing and testing hypotheses from having moderated groups
- content analysis of recordings or transcripts
- triangulation of concepts across demographics and attitudes types
- evolving conclusions, models of thinking and practical insight from the emerging patterns
- identifying concrete recommendations addressing the client brief.

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[1] [Ref 1: BD5303: Monitoring the effects of Environmental Stewardship on Landscape Character and Quality, Countryscape, LUC, Swanwick]

3.0   Main Findings

3.1   Engagement with of woodland & forestry

The respondents who took part in the research were all users of woodland in the landscape and had gained various benefits from visiting woods or seeing woodland within the landscape. Many people had an emotional attachment to woodland and trees.

Most people had a local woodland, often walkable from their home, which they used to gain an immediate 'hit of nature'. During the various pandemic lockdowns, reliance on such places had increased and people had become more intimate with these spaces. They were often quite utilitarian spaces, peri-urban, or sandwiched in-between more built-up conurbations. This can be seen in some of the video diaries.

People usually had two other types of places in addition to this, often a drive away:
(1) more holistic places, such as a Forestry Commission site (eg Chopwell Woods), or a nature reserve, or Woodland Trust site. These places were perceived to be more beautiful (eg good for bluebells), more 'ecologically pure' or had more amenity uses, such as being bike- or picnic-friendly
(2) there were also woods or trees in wilder places which were more part of another wider experience rather, than being a destination.

People talked about woods which were better for either being alone in, or as part of a group – with the former perhaps have more contemplative qualities. A distinction was made between woods that were ancient versus modern plantations.   Native tree species were often described, in particular oak and beech, although actual species names were not always mentioned. Hazel was brought up a lot in the video diaries, but perhaps because the catkins were out during the fieldwork.

Sometimes coniferous trees were mentioned – described as 'pines', 'conifers', or 'fir' trees. The word 'spruce' was not used, although a few people talked about 'larches', with reference to disease. Coniferous woods were used more in the Durham and Exmoor areas than the National Forest – mostly where access exists and there is space between the trees, so quite mature areas and where light penetrates. Generally, however, there was a degree of negativity expressed around conifer woods, as being too dark and lifeless. The exception was where these woods were reframed as places for an adventure, for example on of the video diaries talks about the 'deep-dark' woods being part of their family's experience.   In another case, collecting pine cones was important.

People described how they liked the contrast of being enclosed in a wood and then emerging out into a wide-open space. Or going into a tunnel-like entrance to a wood, seen as the start of an adventure.

Overall, the special qualities of woodland were to provide escape from everyday life and to give a sense of tranquillity. Also important was feeling close to nature, with the sound of birds or the running of water from a stream.

Some participants could be transfixed by individual or solitary trees – as well as the leaves, bark and mosses associated with them. Others were interested in woodland ecosystems, such as mycelium (foraging for mushrooms). The video diaries showed how people can stop and dwell to look at mosses and lichens as part of their experience.

Woodlands, large or small, are clearly valued and people felt a huge sense of ownership of them. Even small plantations were places to look at if access was not available. One participant described these as 'well-behaved' trees. Another pointed out how she loves a line of poplars in the landscape.

Looking at tree cover from a distance was also mentioned as part of the overall landscape experience. Small copses or lines of trees could define a view and make it more aesthetically pleasing. Small woods or copses would also supply an element of variety during a walk even if only walking alongside them and not going in. There was also a delight in watching woodland from afar, as a way of monitoring the seasons – experiencing pleasure from the leaves changing colour (deciduous trees) or having something of interest during the winter months (conifers).

Forestry that doesn't have access but is used for timber production was felt to be an important resource for England. There was a sense that living with commercial forestry was necessary, due to concerns that England would otherwise be more reliant on imports. This would not be good for the environment, because of carbon emission miles. There was increased anxiety about being more self-sufficient in the light of Brexit and the events in Ukraine (the war began towards the end of the fieldwork).

Other non-usage benefits were for wildlife and the environment.

"Getting out in the hills and especially woodland. When I was a kid from about six we used to into woodland and play and build dens, there is something about the smell of woods and the noise of woods that is very tranquil place to be and a bit of Zen." National Forest

"I don't think I have anywhere in particular. But I just like to get out and unwind, staring at a screen all day with work I think it is better to be out that watching rubbish on the TV. The fresh air." National Forest

3.2   Awareness levels and information sources

Respondents were very aware of climate change, for example, talking about COP22, or using the expressions 'climate emergency', 'net zero' and so on. Much of this awareness is gained from the national news, from social media (Facebook) and awareness of activism (eg through Greta Thunberg or programmes and advocacy from David Attenborough).

There were fairly good levels of knowledge about the need for carbon capture, with people using terminology such as carbon sinks. Countryfile was mentioned often and seen as an influence in understanding the landscape and how it works. 'Farmland' in particular has been understood through this lens.

Woodland creation was often thought to be done for increasing wildlife habitats. It was thought to create better biodiversity in the landscape and provide a new eco-system, with those terms being used.

There was a lot of discussion around 'species loss'. The Woodland Trust and National Trust appear to have communicated a lot on the need for woodland creation and were mentioned frequently.

Carbon capture was not always top of mind as a reason for woodland creation but came a pretty close second (to wildlife) and when prompted people immediately realise, saying 'of course!'. There was interest in knowing about tree targets for carbon capture and what percentage increases are required to really make a difference.

Other awareness was around aspects such as soil erosion, nutrient run-off and green corridors. These terms were all used by some people, although they were not always aware of exactly what the terms mean. Again Countryfile, local councils and charities often seen to promote local schemes that are designed to tackle such issues.

The absence of flies and bugs on the windscreen (after a long drive) was often cited as an indicator of the loss of biodiversity. Promotion of the importance of bees has also raised awareness about having a diversity of flora. Programmes such as Springwatch and Autumnwatch have raised people's understanding of habitats. Schools and the Big Bird Count educate people on the fact that species are reducing.

Some are concerned that the Government has entered into a 'race' to plant trees because it an easy route to get to 'net zero' and that, as a result, there will not be enough strategic thought about where the trees are put, in what density and which species are used. Some even thought that tree planting had become 'trendy' or 'all the rage' meaning that people were jumping on the bandwagon.

Some people were aware that farmers and landowners are given grants for tree planting, but they are unsure about whether this would be a tick box exercise, with the woodland not managed properly in the longer term. There even appears to be a lot of awareness around different schemes from listening to the Archers and Radio 4 generally.

Some people mentioned local tree-action groups, formed on social media (Facebook). The forest-school movement also seems to have had an effect in promoting tree planting.

Flooding has also contributed to an increased awareness and to a perception that rivers need to be more robust upstream. A few were aware that trees can help to shore up banks.

People mentioned beaver projects with regard to 'rewilding'. Otherwise, people talked about things like leaving branches and twigs to fall and having piles in woods for hedgehogs. A few brought up the example of the Knepp estate (which has been on Countryfile) and this has educated some people about rewilding issues. Others had an understanding of 'the council' planting wildflowers on road verges.

There is some misunderstanding that rewilding refers to greening of brownfield sites. 'Wild' means anything nature-based that is not 'inside', or urban, or man-made. The assumption is that the countryside is not man-made and is all natural. Some, who live in very rural areas with a lot of open countryside, find it strange that the countryside would need to be made 'wild'.

There is a perception and belief for some that nature does its own thing anyway and that that is what is currently happening.

"Do we really need rewilding down here in Exmoor? It is the rest of the Country surely that needs it! We're so lucky here, it is so beautiful here." Exmoor

3.3   Perceptions of Change

It is difficult for people to remember past changes in the landscape. Many feel that, because they live with something day in, day out, they don't notice much going on. It is often, therefore, stark changes such as tree felling that hold most sway. This was regularly mentioned (with quite emotive language being used) as being shocking or upsetting – despite a recognition that the reason for felling is essentially 'farming' of woods. The visual phases post-felling are a transition but cause concerns of 'ugliness'.

"It looked like Vietnam." Durham

When felling is part of a renovation of a woodland, a few participants were able to point out that these places are quick to recover, with the original seed bank often being still there.   The felling of conifers within woods was mentioned positively, with more light coming into the canopy.

People often believe that the countryside has always looked like it does now. They also find it hard to think (on a landscape scale) whether there are, or are not, 'enough trees' where they live.

People who say that that 'there can never be enough trees' will point out that the country was denuded by the Romans or during the Bronze age or by Drake. Not everyone is convinced that we should go completely back to a landscape where everything was covered in trees but this belief does give credence to the idea of some more tree planting.

Other examples of man's intervention were mentioned by a few – such as Capability Brown landscapes or the Victorian introduction of invasive species which has given us a certain type of aesthetic.

The impact of farming on landscape change was talked about in regard to the changes post-WW2, necessary for food production, but which resulted in the loss of trees and hedgerows. The post-war promotion of large-scale forestry was also often mentioned.

What a landscape currently looks like is often assumed to be natural. If nature hasn't created certain features, then it is 'for a reason'. For example, where trees didn't exist the assumption was made that such places couldn't support trees and that is why they look empty or bleak. They do not automatically think that somewhere 'needs' trees in other words.

It is interesting to see from some of the video diaries that some woods which, to the keen eye, look like original plantations are still described as 'wild' or 'natural' or as one person said 'there is nothing 'manmade here'. They do not realise that there has been a change.   What they mean is that, even if it was planted years ago, nature has done the rest and taken over. These are often green spaces upon which people are highly dependent or which are in beautiful settings.

Other noticeable change comes from a perception that there has been significant loss of ancient woodland.   Change from damage caused by HS2 is remembered. Campaigns from the Woodland

Trust to 'save' woodland and the death of trees from disease has exacerbated this perception of enormous loss.

Other changes in land use have heightened a feeling of loss of the natural world generally, through an increase in house-building, road-building, or the construction of light industrial plants and enormous distribution centres (Amazon, National Forest). A further loss of trees is seen to have occurred through climate change, due to an increase in storm damage.

"I think I enjoyed the fact that there's parts of it that I've seen change since I was a boy, so there were places that were planted in probably the late 50's so they were just young trees when I was a boy and I've watched them conifer plantations we've seen them evolve but then you know there are certain trees that I know well. I know some of the ones I fell out of and nearly killed myself on occasion you sort of it's like part of me memory you know it's the place is really important to me you know." D

"Hamsterley Hall was planted sort of conifers that were planted after the war, I think a lot of the old trees were lost or used and then a lot of conifers were planted but they just grow really tall and thin, they don't look particularly pretty. But saying that we have had Kites nesting around the field, and they've been tagged which was good. We see a lot of the Kites and a lot of deer in the garden/in the fields so they're often around, which is lovely." D

"There's an awful lot of quarries that seem to be taken up. I have seen some of the older quarries where they've landscaped it and part of that has been a combination of open grassland and wooded

areas. That did seem to look a particularly good way of relandscaping." National Forest

"I have noticed that there is more natural regeneration on the moors. I go up quite a lot and I think it is grazed less. I wonder if there are fewer Exmoor ponies or they are not putting sheep out. There are more trees in the coombe more and more trees, silver birch on the way back down to Porlock." Exmoor

"I go to France a lot and often in a field there is a dirt track but that will be lined with trees, that provides shelter and corridors and. In France they will do selective cutting but here we do clear cut and end up with a bit of moonscape until something else is planted. The selective cutting has got to be a lot better for the wildlife than just doing the clear cut." National Forest

3.4   Perceptions of New Woodland Change

Perceptions of tree planting can be very positive, particularly where old heritage industrial sites are regenerated (National Forest, Durham) or where ancient woods are being restored.

Some believe house builders are required to plant in their development in a tokenistic way. Planting on new roadsides can also be criticised. This can be perceived as 'sticks in the ground'. There is a level of mistrust that such planting can be sustainable, with a belief that the trees won't be locally sourced, that they won't be mixed and that they will be planted too thickly to survive.

Plastic tree guards are a bug bear but some regard them as essential to prevent deer eating the trees. There is annoyance that some have seen older plantations left with the guards still on the trunks which erodes confidence that these things are managed properly.

The area with the most comments about positive tree planting change was the National Forest. Here, those who had been around from the start could see a monumental shift in the amount of tree cover and the way that old workings had been revitalised. Even those who had not lived there as long could point to tree planting that had matured nicely during their time there.

> *"We were asked to invest in Conkers and it has gone from not being able to put your washing out because it was absolutely filthy black to lovely! Not a lot of people can remember that industrial history side of things it was horrible. You wouldn't let your dogs go in the water. The*

colour of the water coming of the mines was…." National Forest

In other areas positive tree planting was less mentioned. Where it was it was connected to the Woodland Trust or the National Trust. Other mentions were off the school's tree planting schemes…

There was often a distinction made between tree plantations and new woodland creation. Tree plantations were in straight lines, of the same tree species and planted all together. The connotations of 'woodland' have different characteristics to this in people's minds. The language used for plantations is 'regimented', well-behaved', 'monoculture' and so on.

When being asked about new woodland creation, respondents would therefore want to replicate what they see in nature, taken from ancient woods, with native species, old ways, access and lots of light. There was plea for species variety, including fruit trees in new planting.

> *"Regimented. It doesn't look right. You can drive and see lovely ancient woodland and then next to it has been felled and they plant new trees all in straight lines and all the same height and it's purely to grow a tree that will grow fast and produce a timber product. No-one is thinking about the wildlife." Exmoor*

> *"Personally, I hate it when you see trees and they've been planted in rows. One as you drive past something like that or you walk past, there's every other second you have a complete sightline down a*

line of trees and I think it just looks terrible. I mean it may be the most efficient way of making sure every tree gets exactly same amount of - personally, whatever, and you pack them into the hectare but it's just awful. Nature doesn't do it like that. It looks terrible and I can't think that it feels natural to anything really."
National Forest

Woodland creation schemes in the past had worked best where there was good communication about the aims and objectives and community involvement. There was concern that some companies are taking grants to plant trees on land to help their environmental balance sheet and not necessarily 'doing it right'.

People from the National Forest were well used to new stretches of woodland being planted, one recently in Hartshorne had been done by a company to a high standard but with no engagement and another from a landowner who had publicised his intentions and put a sign up to say there would be some access but in time he would be harvesting a section of it. This seemed to be more acceptable.

The issue of access to a woodland is interesting. Often people assume they will have access, if not there are some woods they will try and access anyway. There was little mention of 'no entry', or private signs. Often the rationale for the new woods overtakes any concerns, particularly for young people:

"It doesn't bother me. As long as there is more greenery and more trees and not more housing I'm not bothered if I can't walk through it." National Forest

When asked where they would like new woodland to be planted, they were not really able to say, apart from in urban areas which are not part of the study. In Durham County there were some large landowners mentioned who could be targeted. They needed some help envisaging where trees would be and thought generally that it was a good thing to do for wildlife and the environment. Some people were surprised that they were being asked and often implied that trees could be planted anywhere prior to being shown any scenarios. Many stated *'well you can never have enough trees'*

"I can't think of anywhere I wouldn't want a wood." Exmoor

"The moorland on top of Exmoor is a one-off kind of area and I wonder if that should be left alone. I read that the peat captures more carbon than planting trees. Dunkery Beacon is nice as it is. The plants and what's there already is quite amazing with bracken and rocks. In the lower part of the valley and farmland is better."
Exmoor

3.5   Response to Visuals

Respondents were shown various images of change in the landscape. There were two types:

(1) single images representing generic woods, a design strategy of some sort, illustrations of rewilding or to poor/good examples of design
(2) a series of photomontages showing change progressions such as tree planting or rewilding.

In each case the respondents were not told what they represented but asked to comment on the visual impact on them, positive or negative. Subsequently a discussion around reasons was conducted. The aim of these exercises was to understand how people might feel about changes around them in the landscape as a result of the tree action plan.

3.5.1 Response to Single Images

The following images were felt to be beautiful. The first was regarded as an ancient woodland with the overarching branches and tunnel views being thought of as 'magical'. It was typical of the types of woodlands they loved being in, as magical and there was a great deal of romanticisation of them.

The second pine tree image was also liked because of the light coming through, the ability to see the horizon and the snow. One group pointed out that the picture had been chosen as the best possible view of conifers ever!

A number of images were regarded as broadly negative in terms of their visual appeal. These would be where there were too few trees or too many.

Overall people found this image fairly negative but was very familiar to them. Some thought it was a plantation in rows but many didn't notice the rows. Whilst it was thought to be a little soulless, the redeeming features were that it had leaf fall so the ground might be good for bugs and mould etc and you could see through to a clearing.

Those with children thought they would access it anyway and have fun in there, whilst most adults thought it was probably inaccessible because the branches were too low down. Most thought it was a young plantation of 5 years and mainly the same species but perhaps not all.

The image was regarded as fairly ubiquitous, uninspiring but not too offensive.

"That is in Poppy woods. But we go in it and we get smacked by branches. It is not the biggest of woods but we have great fun."
National Forest

"There are only certain trees that do well on brownfield sites/ Birch. It is a monoculture. Height. The importance of Hawthorne to give a mid-height." *National Forest*

"More silver birch planting. Isn't there anything else?" *Durham*

The images showing some rewilding were liked and people didn't really notice anything different about them. It seemed like a natural view.

The elements in the centre of the top image were often seen as small scrub rather than trees. There was a little discussion about where accessibility would be maintained and that hopefully the tops would remain uncovered for them to view. There was a general assumption that trees can't grow on the tops because of the wind and the lack of soil depth.

A cautionary note was to retain the ability to see the veteran trees as the younger ones grow up.

Essentially, they liked the idea that a tree has 'chosen' its own place to grow.

Here people felt the view was attractive and interesting because there was a variety of tree heights and species. They also imagined clearings and places to look up at the sky.

However, they weren't entirely sure what they were looking at, some thought the new growth inside was scrub and others thought new tree planting.

They imagined being able to walk through the 'entrance' on a winding path.

"I think I quite like the fact that it's not just trees either. It looks like there is a bit of shrubbery in there and I think that has a huge impact because a lot of the pictures that we've been looking at, it looks like lines of trees. Whereas when you start to look at the ones that we like more you can see there is a variety of sizes and shrubbery and distant planting going on. It's not just planted trees. I know again that would have to be okay and managed and species that are okay together. I think that really adds something to it."
National Forest

"Yes, I like the variety of that one and the fact that by having those areas free of trees you're going to have the woodland flora come back that we've lost and we've lost a lot of. There is a chance for it to come back because obviously that is part of the ecosystem as well and not just the trees. It's going to be all the flowers and the smaller things that would get lost if there was no sunlight coming down so having those little patches would be beneficial, I think for the flora and fauna as well". National Forest

Respondents felt this view was very attractive, liking the slopes with a variety of trees and having the valley bottom with the stream visible.

They appreciated that contours and archaeological features had been left exposed and then there was a 'story' to the view, in the sense that you could imagine what's behind the small hill.

The conifer edge on the tops was mentioned as unattractive, dry and dark with a section left as it is harvested but it seemed to be counterbalanced by the prettiness of the rest of the view.

It was imagined that the slopes had been left to self-generate or 'rewild'.

This image seems quite recognisable to people, especially in Durham. They feel relatively neutral about it and some feel it is pleasant. Others thought the line of trees was too straight, all planted at the same time and could deviate a little perhaps coming down at point to the water as long there was some natural light and short green space by the river to frame the water if not to access it.

A few noticed the younger plantation on the hill and thought it looked fine although that and the hill would be soon obscured by the foreground trees.

The second image here was liked very much. Some thought it was potentially an industrial regeneration site. Depending upon whether they had access they thought more scrub could be closer to the water but the water needed to be viewed. The differing levels of trees were liked as was their perceived variety. Again, the 'lawn' effect showing the contours and leading up to the water on the far side was appreciated.

This view was very much liked with the planting following the contours and exposing the valley to a degree. It appeared to join up the woods on the horizon. There was a blending with lot of variety in the view. Many thought that apart from the horizon it would be difficult to spot a 'plantation' or that anything had changed.

With regard to using new species, respondents were asked about Wellingtonia and Paulownia prior to and post being shown images.

There was a strong reaction against the introduction of non-native species because people were concerned about the invasiveness of them and whether they would upset natural biodiversity or introduce diseases.

With the assumptions that the science would be in place to say that the above issue would not occur, there was slightly less resistance.

On hearing arguments that the species grow more quickly and absorb more carbon, some people rationalised that if they are not seen for example in an area which is being grown just for carbon in a part of a woodland or on a field there could be a sign explaining this.

There was squeamishness about the Paulownia because it looked very 'alien'. Some people could see it as an ornamental in for example National Trust gardens and new of it in that context. If it would not be 'invasive, like Rhododendron, then perhaps there could be pockets of it.

Wellingtonia, again was not liked as a mono-culture but people seemed more familiar with the look of it as similar to other coniferous plantations. Those in Durham were much happier with this than the Paulownia, whilst the other two areas, preferred the Paulownia.

There was some concern that the Wellingtonia did not have bare tree trunks, like pine, which encouraged pine martens and red squirrels. Once again, there were pragmatists who thought these could just be seen as a farm as a short-term measure to help get to net zero, whereas others felt it was 'toying' with nature.

There was a fear expressed about these decisions which would need skilful positioning because mostly people wanted to reject the idea.


"That looks bloody awful!"
National Forest

I think they are rather lovely and the flowers smell amazing. I have one in my garden! Exmoor

"Carbon is only captured for as long as a tree is a tree. What is the life expectancy? You've got to do something with it and harvesting the carbon is released. That is limited effect whereas would it do den building." National Forest

"Would we adopt them because of carbon capture? There are two questions what do we need to do in the short term to get to 2050 and is there something that follows that? You have to accept timber production because otherwise you have to have everything in plastic." National Forest

"There has to be a degree of that that because we do need to resource our own instead of bringing it from Scandinavia or across the pond. We need to really. Part of what we do for building. Durham
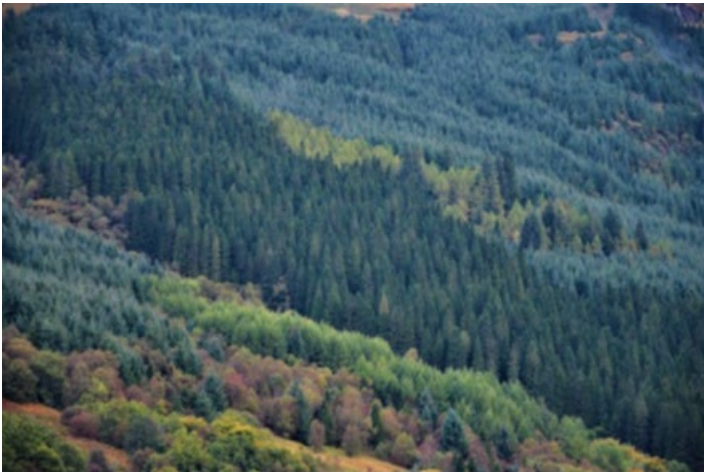
"It dramatically changes and it is left desolate. You have to accept it as part of the commercial reality of life. It makes me really sad, if you have been walking your dog for 2 years and then suddenly its gone. That was horrific for our village then suddenly there is brown stumps." Exmoor

"I am practical about it. We've got forestry with quick growing trees. My only issue is monoculture. That's why we've got problems with the larch disease." Exmoor

3.5.2 Change progression images

This image was regarded as very beautiful and for some, especially in Exmoor as 'quintessentially' English. The foreground trees and the background trees were mentioned as being different with nice silver birch and conifers. There were areas to explore and the field pattern was good with small fields. Some gaps in the hedges could be filled.

"It looks very natural I would have said." Durham

"I think what I notice straightaway is the thing I was talking about going missing which is the field boundaries being wooded." Durham

This degree of change was not regarded as too much but there was consternation about the squareness of the field in the foreground.

The filled in field in the background looked better to people because it seemed more connected. This may have been a perspective issue.

There was a little concern about the loss of livestock and the density of the trees that had been planted in the field.

Initially, people thought that they would have access but accepted that if they didn't the normal footpaths would still be available,

There was enough of the field left for people to accept this was still within their image of the normal farmland but they still requested for the trees to be planted along the lines of the hedgerows. If the whole farm was done this way is would equate to the same amount of trees, wouldn't it? Couldn't the farmer plant copses in the fields or single trees which livestock could graze around?

The degree of resistance to this change was higher in Exmoor, who thought it was a local, expressing fairly negative reactions. In other parts of the country there was less resistance to this change but all over there was a questioning of the strategy to give grants to farmers/landowners to do what they want without some stipulations being given (they imagined). These would include…

> *"It's almost like the crops that they're growing are the trees and that's the only purpose that it would serve rather than being part of the landscape." Durham*

"Yeah, it looks very kind of regimented with the straight edges. Could have like blended in more I think." Durham

"It changes a bit by bit. Sometimes you struggle to notice. If you were going passed day by day you wouldn't notice." National Forest

This image was regarded as significant with the fields being broken up visually and not together. This gave the impression of a change in landscape character. There were concerns about: blocks of woodland, 'squarishness', woods not being linked up not looking accessible.

Alternatives suggested were to join the new planting onto existing woodland and create green corridors with thicker hedges.

This degree of change started to provoke conversations around food production and security because it looked more like removing farmland.

However, to some of a younger more ecologically focussed audience, this looked almost better than the second image because there was more of it for wildlife and if the decision was to convert the farmland, then 'go for it!'. 'There are still some fields for the farmer' and if they've chosen which field then that would be okay.

The National Forest, in particular thought this was better than number two because it some kind of 'flow'.

There were questions about the species to be used. There are concerns about mono-cultures. Some are suspicious that on-going management by farmers/landowner will not happen and that there isn't a system to monitor that. *'The farmer will just take it out in 10 years.'*

Some need explanation that the farmer will be choosing the field and is being paid so people become less worried about them personally. There is then a slow realisation that taxpayers' money is involved in the grant system and so they should be consulted or informed somehow.

"There is a composition that follows the land on that one. Take time to think what that will look like in 10 years' time don't just plant that field because I can't farm it very well or its low yield or something." National Forest

"From a purely aesthetic point of view, I prefer the first picture but honestly, I understand the point of planting more trees it's just you know what I mean…" Durham

"I think it's really important I mean it depends on the overall strategy in the management that it's allowed to be wild with proper undergrowth and be a proper living wood rather than something that's over managed more like a sort of slightly more than a park but less than a proper forest." Durham

"The thing I am not getting is there are lots of place that you could be planting trees that are barren and look a bit crap whereas this is really nice quintessential English scene with the little fields and the hedgerows and I think your point was really valid that you could plant plenty of trees in the hedgerow rather than obliterating all these grazing fields and you wouldn't be annoying farmers." Exmoor

"It doesn't look natural and you won't get fungus with new planting." Exmoor
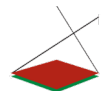
These images enabled people to think more strategically about where tree planting might take place.

Here they were concerned about the disconnected nature of the planting.   In terms of the percentage increase in woodland cover they thought the second image was better. There was an improvement here because they thought the landscape looked quite barren.

"Whilst incentivising farmers individually how do you create a joined-up thing. How do you make a plan for Forest rather than the planting of trees?" National Forest
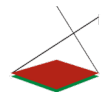
These images came across better because it looked like there were some corridors and the farmer has thought about how to join up the woodland. There were also more hedgerows visible, it looks more green, naturalistic and deciduous. The greater level of cover was preferred.

Overall, they didn't want the countryside to have isolated 'islands' which would be to the detriment of wildlife. However, they recognised that walking through these landscapes they imagined being on a path that would weave through and coming across woods like this from time to time would add variety even without going into them.

The lower right-hand image is preferred just about because it linked up the original spur to the woodland on the top of the hill and seemed to be trying to link to the field planted on the mid left.

Overall, the irregular shape was considered to be acceptable although a little strange and could be more flowing.

It mattered to some people whether the field being given over were arable or pasture. 'Giving up' arable was thought to be to the detriment of food security.

Others liked that the right-hand planting seemed to be following the contour but wondered whether there would be access to walk along the edge line of the hilltop woods anymore.

These visualisations were created by Land Use Consultants for Exmoor National Park.

They were shown without the annotations being readable and respondents were told that this was called 'rewilding' and the second and third images were 10 years and 30 years later respectively.

Respondents thought that the changes were better visually and liked the definition of the top that the greener slopes gave.

Many did not understand what rewilding meant and so further explanation was given. They liked and approved of the method of allowing trees and scrubs to take hold where they would naturally settle. They felt this was more sustainable in the longer term than tree planting where trees often fail, they thought.

The increased cover was considered to be acceptable because it was on very steep land that couldn't be used for walking on. They also thought this meant that it couldn't be used productively for farming or grazing. On learning that grazing would need to be stopped they asked about whether it would need to be fenced off. Most seemed happy with this if there was grazing elsewhere because the result looked very beautiful and was helping capture carbon.

Exmoor locals felt they knew the spot and thought that there would still be enough room elsewhere for the ponies if indeed they could use the steep slope anyway.

Overall, it was considered more 'natural' to have trees in coombes and moorland fringes, which comes out in other areas of this study.
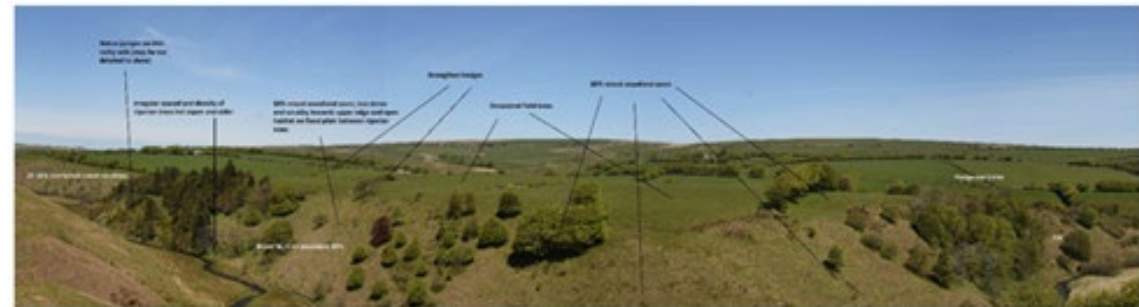
3.5.3 Landscape Character Perceptions

In order to determine more about landscape character and whether certain places were considered not appropriate for woodland some exercises were completed including:
- prioritisation/ranking order techniques
- tree planting games, where respondent placed trees on a baseline either by drawing or dragging and dropping a basic tree graphic
- drawings.

These also helped to understand how people wanted or didn't want certain views to change through woodland creation.

On farmland and where there are fields and hedgerows:

This was often ranked quite low down as somewhere to create woodland for carbon capture for some of the reasons stated earlier. People preferred to follow the field patterns and hedgerows. In the tree planting games most people just enhanced the hedgerows or left it alone. A younger contingent believed that empty grass fields were a waste of time and filled the fields with trees.

The images show a conservatism, indicating that minimal change was preferred here.

"A lot of the fields are for grazing animals and we've lost that trees in fields. There's a couple near me in Horner and the tractors can round them and the sheep graze around them. Big Oaks that give

to me a much more pastoral spirit of place. It gets trees into fields and into the boundaries. It doesn't need to be a huge number of trees." Exmoor

Original image: Blackdown hills

On flat land or floodplain

Many ranked this quite highly as somewhere for trees although, there was much debate about floodplain.

Some believed that floodplains are there to serve a purpose and so should flood therefore it should not be changed to woodland. Others thought that introducing trees to places that flood increases the absorption capacity of that place. The roots would 'knit' up the soil and absorb the water as well as prevent solid erosion.

People were mindful of places where the openness might be valued by locals, eg in The Fens. They then voted for spaced out trees allowed for wandering through or for following existing treelines.

However, flat land generally could be thought of as somewhere to plant lots of trees.

Moorland

Moorland was felt to be an important character type with its own carbon sink qualities from the peat and people often thought it would be inappropriate for tree planting.

A few did think some moorland is too bleak and should be planted for visual interest.

Sparse planting was put in along river valleys or extending where an existing line of some sort was. Those living close to moorland often thought the slopes more acceptable.

"I like to see the contours of the land but there are areas around Dunkery you could put them in the nooks and crannies." Exmoor

Towns and villages

People felt that local access to woodland was very important and whilst they could find their own woods, it was thought be a priority to ensure that people could get out into it. The existing landscape here was not thought to be of high quality and also often included unsightly features or industrial sites that could be softened. Creating woodland could only be an improvement. However, access to these woods was assumed.

Valleys

Valley, cleaves, coombes and moorland fringes were often chosen, as mentioned earlier to provide definition to the contours and to avoid planting on the tops. If a valley was very beautiful however, with a winding river running through people, tended to leave it alone. Access here was not always assumed.
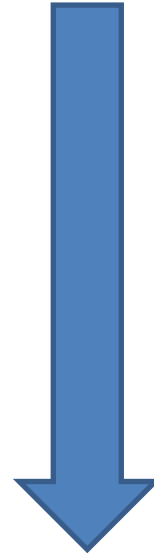
- near towns and villages
- in valleys but...
- on flat land but...
- on fells or hillsides
- infill into existing woodland
- on farmland where there are fields and hedgerows
- *on floodplains*
- on hilltops
- moorland

The above shows a qualitative ranking of the order where people would create woodland first. The red ones at the bottom are often designated as not for planting.

3.5.4 Design principles

As has already been shown, people are keen for planting to accentuate contours, landform and be in keeping with what is already there.

They also talk about planting in 'swathes' or having curvy edges. The idea of rewilded edges was popular as was the idea of having gaps around hillsides as is seen by some of the tree drawing done on hills.

Local distinctiveness was very important to the majority of people rather than spirit of place although some related to the latter when talking about 'essential character of moorland' or 'following field patterns. A few comments were made about moorland (Dartmoor) originally having been covered in trees and that it is kept low for grouse shooting and a few will say that 'well fields were made by humans in the first place'

Again, hilltops are often asked to be kept free of trees in order that the view can be seen from the top although there are some examples of places where that is not always the case. The Wellington Monument has trees but the experience at the tops is regarded as good. Another point was made by people keen to ensure that enough trees are planted that *"there are plenty of hills around here I am sure we can spare some!"*
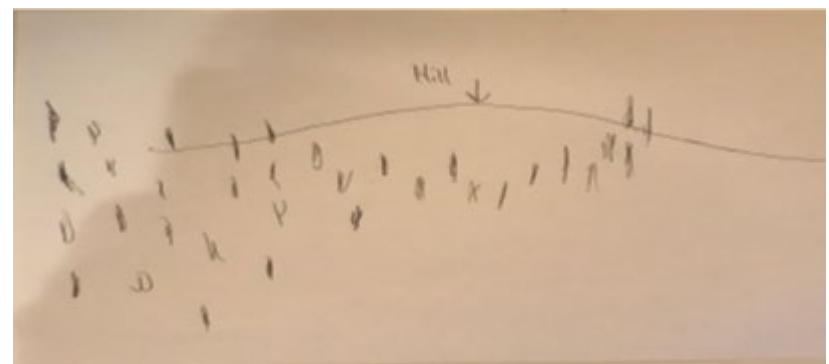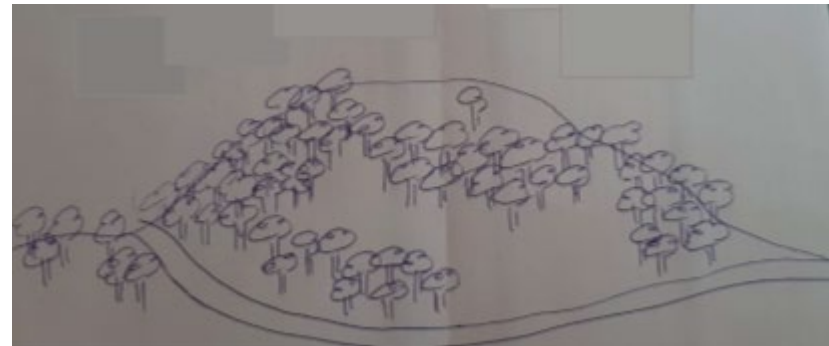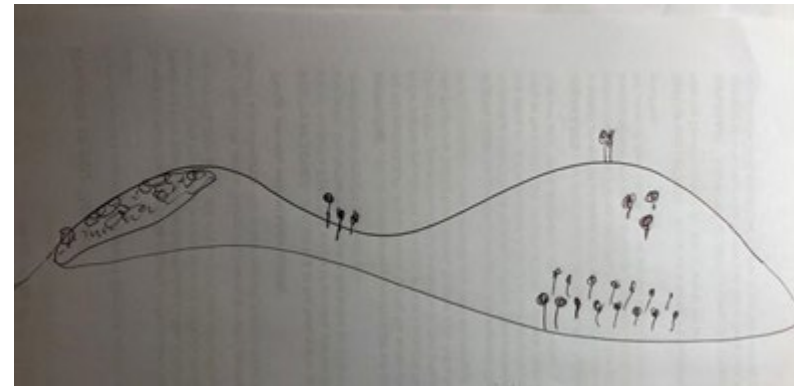
It is difficult to suggest a hierarchy as people thought all design principles were all important. There is a lot of spontaneous talk about shape and planting not standing out when it matures. There is some acceptance of transitionary period when woodland is young and it not looking 'pretty' but for some this interim ugliness can drive perceptions.

They were certainly drawn to making the new woodlands as naturalistic as possible and to them this meant:

Curvy, rewilded edges, matching contours, mixed specific, different heights, lone trees, patchy pockets, field corners, copses, ragged edges, 'sculpting' the landscape.

Not everyone talked about following the field patterns spontaneously but they often wanted this when shown some. Also, whilst they don't say they want local distinctiveness upfront, they talk about wanting woodland creation to 'blend' or fit in. There was some variation here in the locations with exceptions being made for the regeneration of industrial sites; the perception being that there is nothing to 'fit in' with.

There was a contingent in the Durham catchment who felt local distinctiveness of 'the fell' meant openness and a lack of trees.

- the shape, not straight edges, more curvy edges, rewilded edges
- naturalistic planting
- being designed to match the contours of the land (hillsides)
- matching the local distinctiveness of the landscape
- following the field patterns

3.5.5 Change response types

One way of looking at the public's response to change is to recognise that people have different perspectives based on their attitudes and philosophies on life.   The following is a break-down of attitudinal typologies or segmentation. It summarises the different approaches that people had towards new woodland creation. The 'types' are an early indication from this particular study of how populations might be described in terms of this policy area. This could be developed with further research as it is often helpful with targeting of engagement messages.

Eco-imperative Drivers	Wildlife Connectors	Enhancement champions	Hopeful pragmatists	Status Quo +	Resistors
• Blanket planting • In a hurry • Younger • Off-gridder hippies • Motivated by climate change	• Want to create corridors • Connect up and extend through planting • Motivated by species loss	• Love trees • Want to 'scultpt' the landscape view • Involvement • Motivated by beauty in the landscape	•Want to bridge a solution •Diplomatic •Help farmers and people •Find a middle way •Trees are not the only way •Worry about politics	• Happy to change a small amount • Agree with societal progress • Small slow and steady • Don't want to rock the boat	• Prefer minimal interference • Want personal places to stay the same • Not convinced that tree planting is a catch all • Perceived threat to current landscape

4.0   Area-specific feedback

4.1   National Forest-specific feedback

There was high awareness of the National Forest as a concept with those who had been around at the start expressing huge pride about the achievements being made.

Many woods and regeneration sites were mentioned by name with people having access to interesting places that incorporate the heritage of the area. There is a huge affinity to a number of different with a plethora of experiences available. People are quite reliant on the different sites and repeat visit although sometimes as a result of lockdowns, there has been greater exploration.

There is high awareness of new planting and or maturity of planting. A few people are still waiting for it all to be connected up as the term 'Forest' implies but others are completely satisfied. A few jokes remain about the signs heralding the Forest but for it not to be seen. Locals are happy to defend this with pride saying that there are huge improvements and that such comments are misconceptions.

The woods available are intimate and very useable but often people go further afield for more ancient woodland or larger scale, activity-based Forestry sites.

The site available are used on a repetitive basis and the opportunities for engagement are strong. Some are not aware of volunteering opportunities but would like to know how to contact the National Forest.

A few using the new woodlands are in the mindset of thinking of them as 'parks'.   Is there permission to pick the fruit or use a branch to make a wreath? Can I take groups in for mental health activities?

Positive Mention for Woodland:
—   Hicks Lodge
—   Conkers
—   Sense Valley
—   Willesley
—   Dimminsdale
—   Donnisthorpe Woodland Park
—   Moira Furnace Country park
—   Beacon Hill
—   Charnwood
—   Poppy wood
—   Hartsthorne

"I got married in a wood. Beacon Hill in Leicestershire. My Mum passed away and that was her favourite spot. Her favourite place was where there was some sun by some crossroads so we've got a bench there and she requested that we go there instead of a graveyard and when there is a Robin it is symbolic and we are constantly den building. So many photos of my son den building there over the years. The small. LCC gave us permission to get married there and put a bench."

"During Covid we did the daily walks locally around the back of the Conkers Visitor Centre, I saw it through every season. I enjoyed being there! All the years I didn't realise this was so nice."

"Some of the spaces that we have got locally give you that safe vulnerability when you go there you realise that all your problems can be put into context not to worry about them for that while. I'm thinking of some of the opencasts that have been re-assigned and the huge water spaces that are there now and I do a lot of wild water swimming and they are great places to be and you come feeling so re-freshed."

"For me, I was aware of the National Forest as a name before coming up here and had some imagery. That image was very swiftly broken. It's the National Forest but where is it? I was thinking it was ancient woodland but most of it is old colliery land in there are bits here and there being reclaimed and redeveloped. It feels very young and yet to reach its potential."

"I can remember my husband when we first met. He was telling me about 2 or 3 schemes that was going to be set aside for a new

forest and I was fascinated. It ended up being where we lived. I have noticed a change in the maturity of the trees."

"This sounds negative but it isn't, it seems to me that the National Forest is more of an idea than a Forest so it's 'we want to plant more trees and we will put that under an umbrella of the NT. They are all in disparate pockets around some of which you can connect together if you are going out for a walk or a drive about a lot them are ok we can go to this site here some of that is local authority and some is woodland trust,"

4.2   Durham-specific feedback

The research showed that people felt very lucky to live in the area because of the choice of places to go. There were local woods as well as Forestry sites, regeneration sites, upland and coastal areas to access further away.

There was special mentioned of special ancient woods and also newly created ones by The Woodland Trust.

The Land of Oak and Iron had a high level of awareness with many people accessing this for the 'café', although some felt it was quite a managed site. The connection to woodland was not always there for people plus it could be very busy. They had done a lot of engagement at the start which people remembered positively and the signage generally around industrial heritage sites generally was considered positively. People had engaged with stories about the area supplying wood for the Spanish Armada. Another mention was buddy benches for people to talk about mental health.

A number of old Hall, Manor Houses, Large family estates were mentioned as having beautiful places to go and also to be potential landowners to target for tree planting.

Other significant elements important to people was the Derwent Valley and converted railway line that were valued enormously but currently perceived to be under threat.

Beamish Woods and Heritage Centre was felt to be important locally.

There was little awareness of the North England Community Forest, but this would be expected as it is in its infancy.

Chopwell woods were extremely well known and used although there had been some felling recently. It was known for some antisocial behaviour but also for beauty and Oak Trees. Some mentioned it was great for cycling while other thought it attracted too many bikers. The events/festivals that were put on before the pandemic were liked. It was felt to be good for Scout Groups and den building.

There was concern about the encroachment of housing around Consett and the loss of habitat corridors. There had been a lot of good work done to green up 'The heaps' and old mines generally though and things had been transformed. People were particularly interested in more peri-urban tree planting but more rurally felt that tree cover was already pretty good.

There were more favourable comments made about coniferous plantations than in the other two areas.

Some affinity for open moorland such as the Pennines was displayed with conservatism being expressed about planting here.

Positive mentions for woodland:

Hamsterley
Chopwell
Waskerley
Hartley Hall
Beamish
Derwent Valley
Thornley woods
Burnhall woods

but the woods are still huge! There's going to be a nature reserve somewhere at the Banks."

"I think we are very lucky to live in the North East, we have a tremendous variety of where to go, especially in Stanley. Coming from the Midlands where you struggle to get open space. I think of Stanley as a bit of a hub. The coast is close, Northumberland is close, rural Durham Weardale and then you can go to the Pennines. Fabulous place to live really. We've got the lot."

"The access to the countryside and the seaside. We do a lot of walking. The cycling attracted us to the Consett area. The converted railway line. There is a bit of a threat if it is converted back!"

"I live in Flinthil. A huge wood at Dibden which used to be an old colliery. We look with the kids at school how it has changed with the mining. Quite a lot of that has been cut down. As far as I know there's been nor planning permission. They haven't planted anything in its place as far as I can see. Cut right back into Dibden

4.3   Exmoor-specific feedback

People from Exmoor and its immediate catchment felt they lived in a particularly unspoilt area. They talked about various woodland that was important to them on all sides of the territory.

There is an impression that they are well protected from intrusion apart from on the highways where roadbuilding further towards the M5 is trying to increase transport links to the area.

People were quite in touch with nature and the landscape. There was mention of rewilding, foraging and going 'off-grid' more than was experience in the other areas. There was some difference between those who had moved into the area versus more long-time residents. Those moving in had quite an eco-mindset.

Exmoor National Park was felt to remain relatively quiet whilst the National Trust seemed more visible, although it was not the purpose of the study to find this out.

The central core which are the moorland tops receive much discussion with Dunkery Beacon being a focus. Debates around grazing were centred on Exmoor ponies being good for biodiversity and the long-standing question of deer management also featured.

When discussing, people were in favour of tree planting apart from on the top of Exmoor. There were jokes about using planting to hide the visual intrusion in views given by Butlins and Hinkley Point but otherwise they considered that there was plenty of space for it.

Positive mention for Woodland:

Holnicote
Timbercombe
Hopcot
Wiveliscombe reservoir
Wallen wood
Horner woods
Willet Hill
Brendon Common
Simonsbath
Ancient Oaks in Dunster
Chargot wood
Cordon Hill
Elworthy

5.0   Conclusions

This research endorses the view that people gain enormous benefits from woodland. The pandemic has intensified their need for local spaces and woods as part of the landscape as one of their valued experiences.

People also feel that woods are important for biodiversity and wildlife. They are aware of the need for carbon capture through tree planting but sometimes need reminding of this fact as another way of reaching 'net zero'.

Woods and trees are regarded as an important aesthetic within a view of a landscape – they add interest, draw the eye, tell a story and give the impression of a healthy landscape. They can also define landform, accentuate rivers or water and create perspective.

When inside, woods provide comfort, escape, stress relief and various levels of activity. A variety of people talk about having a 'connection' with woodlands.

The research participants did not remember much past change in the landscape and often think that nature all looks after itself. There is awareness now about new tree planting but it can often only be thought of as commercial forestry. Mostly, the mention of change is in relationship to felling – which can seem extremely shocking to people.

The research shows that most people are in favour of planting more woodland, but they have particular views about how the woods should look or, at least, what they would not like to see. There are many pragmatists who say that it's fine if they aren't interacting with these types of woods, but they still want the plantations to act like the woods that they know, by being good for wildlife and not looking too regimented.

There is a difference in the generations, with younger audiences being more interested in issues such as sustainable eating – so they are less protective of farmland for livestock. A few of these younger people are driven to plant trees anywhere and everywhere because they see the need for carbon capture as being urgent. However even in this age group, preserving landscape character and local distinctiveness is important.

Both generations want to know that woodland creation is well thought through in terms of having a mix of native species. Ideally, they would like a variety of tree heights and for trees not to be planted in straight lines. Having a naturalistic look was important. Also, rewilding as a concept was much liked.

Most felt that communication and community engagement was important for them to understand why fields or large tracts of land were being planted. It was felt that, if the planting was more regimented or looked unpleasant in the early years, communication of purpose would go a long way to alleviate this.

There is some understanding about the planting of trees for timber production in order for self-sufficiency. The idea of being self-sufficient is regarded as important for climate change too and helps to win over people who are not fans of large coniferous plantations.

People are wholly behind trying to save the planet and improve the country's carbon capture, but they also believe there are other types of landscape types which capture carbon well, or even better than woodland.

There is a little mistrust about a system of grants because it might imply that those planting trees have the wrong motivations, or that they will not keep the woodland going long term. Trust has been eroded also by house building and highways planting which can be regarded as too utilitarian.

It is clear from exploring the visual material and from the videos gathered during the study that fairly basic woodlands are still valued, even if they do not exhibit good design.

There were a number of aspects of change that were not noticed, including the rewilding images, the extension of existing woodlands, and small plantations.

When asked to make a choice, people are happier with keeping or thickening field boundaries and hedgerows. They prefer copses, broken-up edges, planting in coombes, on moorland edges and following existing tree lines or other line features. People seem less happy with existing whole fields being planted, but can be

brought on board with this idea if the balance between food security and the need to capture carbon is kept and made believable. Expect that the argument on food security will need to be made.

Some people imagine that grants could be for a mix of access and non-access schemes – and that all existing public footpaths would remain for use in any case. Those woods that aren't accessible would be regarded almost as 'carbon farms' – which seems to increase the appeal to many, especially amongst younger audiences.

When shown a list of design principles, people were very positive about all of them. Many had not previously thought about the issue of woodland design and thought that, in any case, things change, grow up and mature around them without really being noticed. In some senses, people wondered why they were being asked about planting trees: "what's not to like?".

However, they did impose restrictions when seeing some of the visuals. It would be more difficult to argue the case for certain types of planting: the introduction of new non-native species, planting of hilltops and open moorland, and where small field patterns exist.

This implies that unless planting is relatively unobtrusive and sympathetic to the landscape, purpose communication and community engagement will be needed to ensure people's buy-in.

Further Research

There is a case for widening the scope of this pilot study to address all users of the countryside, not just those with direct experience of woodlands. And to explore a segmentation of people across the general population. There may be people in the general population who are more 'resistor' types than the sample researched in this study. Also, there may be people in the general population who perhaps use the countryside less and who just want green space, caring less about what woodlands should be like.

As well as just generally obtaining a larger sample, areas for future research could include:

- looking at public perceptions in other areas, with different landscape characteristics
- using more targeted visuals, with specific places in mind
- testing specific information sources
- more on the potential for community engagement, including communication messages and developing a model of best practice for local schemes
- a focus on perceptions of access
- a quantification of public perceptions.

Appendices

Appendix A: Literature Review

**Perceptions of Landscape Change: Review of Literature
Forestry Commission**

1. Introduction

This rapid review of the literature relating to the perceptions of landscape change has focused on the importance of woodlands and the benefits that they deliver, but mostly on the extent to which differing design principles and practices can influence this effect. A total of eight papers with at least some relevance to the project were identified, although – in many cases – the relevance was somewhat tangential.

The review took into account the four main objectives of this study, with a view to uncovering findings that might shed some light on the issues. In outline, the four objectives relate to:

- public engagement
- landscape change
- support for woodlands
- design strategies and impacts.

The papers span a period of more than thirty years – the earliest was from 1989, the most recent from 2022.

2. Changing Context

The first issue to note concerns the way in which the context for the studies has changed over time. The earlier papers introduce the idea that woodlands are important for **people** – that woodlands are not simply places for timber production, but can be important for local residents and visitors as well. They are also written to bring a focus on the broad health benefits that woodlands and forest can deliver – such as physical exercise and mental well-being. But it is important to note that these early papers do not always take people's views into account explicitly – they tend to rely on research with experts and professionals.

The context shifts subtly over time, with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment framework becoming more important, along with the ecosystem and cultural service impacts that woodlands can deliver. Next comes 'place', but we have been unable to locate any papers that put woodlands in the context of more recent concerns such as global warming, carbon sequestration, rewilding or the new agri-environment schemes. Perhaps it's still too early for these latter contexts to make an impact in academic literature.

3. Topics

One gets an impression of a focus that is both narrow and fragmented. Although academic interest in the topic of the benefits that woodlands can provide starts at a whole-wood scale, it becomes more diverse over time. And there are some gaps in knowledge too. So there are papers about woodland provision in upland areas and in urban or peri-urban contexts, but we have been unable to locate anything relevant about woodland provision in lowland or coastal areas, or heavily-agricultural landscapes.

The scale of change is also quite limited to a number of topics – deciduous vs coniferous, mixture and variety, the avoidance of straight lines, the importance of glades, the importance of accessibility being regular examples. We have been unable to find any public-focused research that has examined some of the smaller-scale issues raised in the recent guide to planning new woodland in England, for example the protection of archaeological sites and the retention of sightlines, or the protection of ridgelines and hilltops. In other words, the issues examined are not a complete assessment of the public's attitudes to many features of woodland design – there are many gaps in knowledge.

It is also evident that the focus of most research has been on the *visual*, with few references to the public's views on woodland soundscapes, such as the impact of birdsong. In fact, the opportunities to experience wildlife within a woodland context (with the implications here of rich habitats and biodiversity) are very rarely examined.

4. Research Methods

A few words about the methods used by researchers.

Many of the studies have either combined qualitative and quantitative methods or have attempted to quantify qualitative 'data', possibly because of some nervousness about not having 'numbers' when using wholly qualitative research approaches, despite the very rich data that they can produce. The almost-exclusive focus on the visual aspects of woodland provision (noted above) have led to (or been driven by?) a range of different ways of showing visual material, according to the available technology at the time – from sketches to photographs to computer-generated images.

As far as we have been able to determine, there has been nothing in the literature as yet on virtual reality as a research tool.

5. Other Issues

Some other issues arising from the literature that might be useful for this present study:

- there is a continuing theme over time concerning underrepresentation of people from **BAME communities** in the visitor mix in English woodlands. Although seen to be a problem, there are few signs that the low representation has been successfully addressed
- a number of studies have drawn attention to the importance of **community groups** for the establishment and ongoing maintenance of woodlands – and for ensuring perceptions of safety (through the removal of litter, for example). Local woodland groups can also be important in helping people engage with woods
- so ongoing **management of woodland** can be almost as important as provision/design. Woodlands with no or poor management can lead to litter, anti-social behaviour, feelings of fear. This is particularly so in peri-urban environments

6. Study Appraisals

An appraisal of the research examined in the literature review, in terms of their relevance to the present study, is set out over the following pages.

Lee, T., (1989). What Kind of Woodland and Forest do People Prefer? Paper to the Countryside Recreation Conference, 'People, Trees and Woods'

Review and findings based on a mix of qualitative research (focus groups) and a public survey. Also expert interviews.

Findings:

- Low level of engagement with people by FC, despite growth of public participation more widely (eg local govt). Most development based on 'expert evidence'
  - Expert model
  - Psychological model – emotional response (cf Kaplan)
  - Existential model – also subjective, but takes historical associations into account
  - Psychophysical model – relates perceived quality to physical landscape features
- Importance (and mystery) of broadleaf woodland. Contrast with 'closed-in' coniferous plantations
- Importance of mythology as influence to people's views
- Timber production accepted, but remote from personal experience, or mixture
- Doesn't draw any useful conclusions

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Macnaghten, P., Grove-White, R., Weldon, S., Waterton, C. (1998). Woodland Sensibilities
Recreational Uses of Woods and Forests in Contemporary Britain. Centre for the Study of Environmental Change for the Forestry Commission

An examination of the ways in which public attitudes and sensibilities of the recreational use of woods and forests are now developing in the context of broader understandings of social, cultural and environmental issues in contemporary Britain.

Focus groups and interviews with professionals.

General findings:

- The experience of trees and woods appears to have intimate personal significance for most people in Britain - as contact with nature, as a source of tranquillity and reassurance, and as 'social' space. However, such experience is associated overwhelmingly with broadleaf and 'informal' multi-species woods, rather than with 'commercial' plantations or softwoods
- People's perceptions of the recreational benefits of woods tend to be highly *local*, not only in the geographical sense, but also phenomenologically, in the sense that specific 'local' circumstances and experience shape their attitudes about what is necessary or desirable. Research attention to such 'fine grain' issues offers the prospect of insights which may assist future strategic recreational planning and provision
- What people want from woods and forests is influenced crucially by factors such as personal and family life-stage, socio-economic circumstance, and geographical location. Different people have sharply different recreational aspirations towards woods. These also vary at different points in their lives
- Most people's use of woods needs to be understood in the context of their wider recreational use of the countryside. For many, the availability of secure open space or the possibility of relaxed open-air interaction with friends or family may be quite as significant as the distinctive 'woodedness' of particular locations

- The perceived needs of children, within the context of the family (nuclear or lone-parent), are a key determinant of the 'recreational' expectations of that significant proportion of the population who are active parents. But these requirements vary greatly according to the ages of the children in question
- There are signs that significant ethnic minorities feel disconnected, and even deterred, from recreational use of rural Britain. This may relate in part to the embedded cultural association of woodlands and countryside with notions of 'English' identity which are arguably at odds with present multi-cultural realities
- People display little *direct* knowledge of the significance of issues of ownership of woodlands, but they have a tacit sense of the different constraints and opportunities of use, through the respective 'body languages' of different ownership regimes. For example, people tend to have a sense of woods owned by the National Trust, the Forestry Commission or private owners of subtly different kinds
- There are few overt indications on the ground of the significant social tensions between town and country implied in recent high profile political controversies such as the recent 'Countryside March' and 'Right to Roam' controversies. However, in certain places, apparent tensions between established local recreational priorities and those of 'visitors' may reflect deep seated 'cultural' resentments
- In general, the *range* of public recreational needs appears to be similar in England, Wales and Scotland. However, there is a striking difference in both the sense and the availability of accessible open space and countryside in Scotland, compared with that in England (even the rural north) - a fact which may be conditioning the relative intensities of 'access' debates in the two countries.

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Scott, A., (2006). Assessing public perception of landscape: past, present and future perspectives. CAB Reviews: Perspectives in Agriculture, Veterinary Science, Nutrition and Natural Resources 2006 1, No. 041

The paper "seeks to untangle the complex array of conceptual and methodological frameworks that have evolved in landscape perception. In such respects, special attention has been placed on the cultural, humanistic and visual approaches set within an emerging landscape science."

Interesting findings:

- perception research can be divided into four key areas:
  - sources of public perception (expert and non-expert)
  - psychological and mental constructs of perception (psychophysical and cognitive)
  - analytical approaches towards perception (quantitative or qualitative) and
  - measurement concepts of perception (physical qualities, stated preference or scenic beauty, and experience)
- an increasing number of [academic] authors have endorsed 'bottom up' approaches to public perception and preference research arguing that as it is the public who ultimately experience changing landscapes, their views and preferences must be included in decision-making
- Most research and policy attention has focused on the visual aesthetic of landscape largely through the use of quantitative-led tools. These include:

- pre-selected images (by the researcher) for comparison by the respondent both on- and off-site in a questionnaire (the 'photo-questionnaire')
- virtual reality landscapes and questionnaires; and
- questionnaires completed by the respondent on-site, i.e. as they are looking at and experiencing the land scape in question

- One drawback of conventional visual methods is that the researcher-led approach conditioned respondents' feedback. This has shaped a more respondent-led method involving participatory photographic techniques, which allow respondents to take their own photographs signifying what they see as important (the results of a US study that used this approach "revealed that natural sights and sounds enhanced the visitor experience, whereas non-natural or human-origin sights and sounds impacted negatively on beauty and solitude")
- Swanwick has shown that, when people were asked about how well a particular landscape would tolerate change, information about the landscape was a more important influence than what it looked like, in determining people's responses
- Lee and Ingold accompanied walkers on routine walks, with a particular focus on the city environment and walks to and from work. Using a combination of methods including participant observation (through sharing the walk experience with them), participant diaries and photography, semi-structured interviews and sound recordings of the field environments, they explored the notion of 'embodiment' through the practice of walking. Their experiences uncovered several intricacies of emotion associated with walking, even in the simple everyday routine walk to work

- a series of landscape tours in Wales captured future landscape priorities without specific developments to bias opinion. Significantly, all communities had concerns about pace and scale of development and how local public views were being bypassed
- public perception studies have generally sought to identify consensus style outputs. The question of consensus versus individual or categories of group response is important and overlooked and there is a case for preference studies to look more closely at variation between groups and treat public(s) differently.

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Stewart, A., O'Brien, E. (2010). Inventory of social evidence and practical programmes relating to trees, woods and forests and urban/peri-urban regeneration, place-making and place-shaping. Forest Research

A bibliographical inventory and summary of available information at the time, sourced from published and unpublished reports, papers etc. Focusses on peri-urban evidence and regeneration, although some information about wider contexts. Key findings listed were:

- It is important that woodlands are located close to where people live to secure the maximum social benefits from them.
- Trees and woods are an important part of cultural identity; projects, activities and events in urban woodlands can provide a useful expression of local identity and encourage a sense of ownership over wooded places.
- There is strong evidence that trees and woods can provide restorative and therapeutic benefits and improve cognitive

functioning. Evidence relating to the benefits of trees and woods in relation to physical exercise is mixed.

- Trees can be significant elements in improving perceptions of place which can in turn lead to increased residential property values and an enhanced willingness to pay for goods and services.
- Concerns about safety, crime and anti-social behaviour act as a barrier to woodland access for many people, especially women, those from an ethnic background and children (because of their own and their parents' perceptions).
- Woodlands and woodland-based interventions can help build a stronger sense of belonging, improve social inclusion and community cohesion, and enhance community capacity to achieve shared goals through increased social capital

Findings specific to accessibility & usage, also culture and landscape:

- accessibility & usage
  - It is important that woodlands are located close to where people live and that projects to create new woodlands are situated where as many people as possible can benefit from them.
  - Currently two-thirds of all trees are on private land or less accessible public land.
  - In some areas, certain groups in society are under-represented in terms of their use of woodlands, including women, older people, young adults, those with disabilities, those with a low socio-economic status, and those from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background.
  - Targeted community engagement and facilitated access are necessary to build confidence and make minority ethnic groups feel welcome.

- People's perceptions of woodlands influence their use of woodlands, both in terms of whether they use them and how they do.
- A range of constraints or barriers to accessing woodlands have been identified including perceived barriers, social and emotional barriers and physical and structural barriers.
- Urban forests need to be managed to meet competing needs.
- Woodlands in the countryside are often more frequently visited than those situated in and around urban areas
- culture and landscape
  - People view trees as symbolic of nature and they hold a wide range of symbolic places within people's imagination.
  - Trees and woods are viewed as an important part of England, Scotland and Wales's cultural identity and cultural heritage.
  - Projects, activities and events in urban woodlands can be an important part of local culture and an expression of local identity providing people with a sense of ownership of wooded places. These projects and activities can also lead to greater confidence to access woods and provide opportunities for learning, health etc.
  - Forests in urban areas can be see as exclusionary e.g. unwelcoming, neglected and populated by people carrying out activities they should not such as setting fire to trees, dumping rubbish etc.
  - Generic indicators of social and cultural values of European forests have been created.

- People make links to their childhood experiences of using, accessing and enjoying trees and woodlands when they talk about the value of trees and woods

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O'Brien, E., Morris, J., Stewart, A. (2014). Engaging with Peri-Urban Woodlands in England: The Contribution to People's Health and Well-Being and Implications for Future Management. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health

A paper about people and their contact with the natural environment as part of everyday life, focusing on peri-urban woodlands in England for health and well-being. Qualitative data were collected in situ via walks in the woods, focus group discussions and photo elicitation, with a sample of 49 people. Key findings:

- a distinction between two main groupings, Local Community Woodlands (sites used by local people who travel from a short distance) and Destination Woodlands (sites usually larger in size, used by a mix of local residents and visitors who travel from further afield)
- woodlands that were managed and had some facilities (e.g., such as good footpaths, toilets, information and directions, benches, car park) were seen as critical in affording practical use and engagement for those who were: i) less familiar with visiting or accessing woodlands from an early age; ii) older; iii) with mobility problems
- higher levels of site management (e.g., orientation information, ranger/staff presence or the presence of other users) were important for people who were concerned about safety and did not want to visit alone, or were concerned about getting lost

- people used the term unmanaged not to mean neglect but to mean a wood which was constructed as more natural (i.e., not obvious that much management was taking place)
- people favoured variety and complexity in the woodland environment including some open spaces that gave them views across the landscape
- woodlands are richly symbolic environments and large trees are, in particular, perceived as the physical expression of a range of meanings and values – and significant in relation to perceived health well-being. Trees helped people to reflect on their problems and life in general
- some people referred to the particular qualities of the woodland canopy and how it can engender a sense of safety, security and protection
- for some people, visiting woodlands enabled them to be more sociable and to feel more a part of wider society or their local community, thus reducing feelings of social isolation
- led and organised activities and events can be important, particularly for those who are less familiar with visiting woodlands, those who do not want to visit alone, those keen to meet other people or try out a different activity, and those who have concerns about getting lost

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Dunn, M., Sing, L., Clarke, T., Moseley, D. (2020) Attitudes Towards Landscape Benefits and Woodland Creation in Southern Scotland. Forest Research

A study into attitudes towards landscape benefits and woodland creation in Southern Scotland, commissioned by Scottish Forestry. Key findings:

- the overall landscape is valued as a multifunctional resource, with wildlife, recreation, scenic quality and revenue generation perceived by respondents to be particularly important considerations for land use planning decisions and policy
- respondents were classified into three groups of people described as either multi-functionalists (57% of the sample), naturalists (38%) or agriculturalists (5%)
- there is strong support for increasing the amount of land dedicated to wilderness and nature, timber production and - to a lesser degree - residence. In contrast, there is relatively little support for increasing land use for energy production and farming, or for the landscape remaining unchanged
- the most acceptable landscapes contain access opportunities (e.g. for recreation), a degree of openness and the absence of utilities infrastructure. Preferences around the species and habitats contained within a landscape appear to be secondary. But there is strong support for increasing trees, woodlands and forests in Scotland as a whole
- the vast majority of respondents consider their local area to be either suitable or extremely suitable for the establishment of new woodlands and forests. Perceptions of suitability tend to be greater among younger generations, those residing in towns and suburbs, and respondents classed as naturalists
- there is widespread agreement that an increase in trees, woodlands and forests in respondents' local areas would lead to a suite of positive impacts, with improvements to air quality being chief among these. Societal benefits such as carbon sequestration and flood prevention are perceived to be of relatively low importance
- the most concerning aspects of new, larger scale productive woodlands include the potential impacts on i) wildlife and biodiversity ii) the rural road network and iii) the landscape's scenic quality
- Were any new, larger scale productive woodland to be created, there is consensus that it would be important for a suite of opportunities and benefits to be delivered. Chief among these are benefits to wildlife and biodiversity, provision of local employment and training, and access for recreation.

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Staddon, P., Urquhart, J., Mills, J., Goodenough, A., Powell, J., Vigani, M., Simmonds, P., & Rowe, E. 2021. Encouraging woodland creation, regeneration and tree planting on agricultural land: a literature review. NEER020. Countryside and Community Research Institute report to Natural England. Natural England.

A literature review with little of relevance to this study, but some findings may be influencing people's attitudes in more rural areas:

- barriers to increased woodland planting include a lack of human and financial resources, a lack of knowledge and skills related to woodland management, as well as a perception that such practices are not profitable and incompatible with existing farm practices
- the long-term nature of tree planting is a clear barrier to woodland expansion, with a perceived loss of control over land use, and uncertainty about the possibility to revert to alternative land uses. For those who would plant trees for timber rather than biodiversity or other goals there are also the issues of financial risk and inconsistent income streams. A barrier would appear to be that some farmers view forestry as

unprofitable, even when it is more profitable than their current farming business

- societal 'norms' and the issue of self-identity is important (e.g. 'I'm a farmer not a forester'). Self-identity, which can underpin decisions, might in some cases override economic considerations and financial incentives and, along with public attitudes can also affect decisions by influencing the perception of what is considered 'good' farming.

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Iversen, S., van der Velden, N., Convery, I., Mansfield, N., Holt, C. (2022). Why understanding stakeholder perspectives and emotions is important in upland woodland creation – A case study from Cumbria, UK. Land Use Policy

An overtly complicated study that uses Q methodology to examine the extent to which differing stakeholders have similar views of woodland creation in the Howgill Fells NCA, an area with particularly low woodland cover in the Lake District. But useful for the attitudinal statements that were used in the Q-analysis (see overleaf).

Statement
New woodlands in the uplands should be planted with consideration to flood protection
Farmland in the uplands should be used for agricultural production, not woodland planting
New woodlands in the uplands should be planted with consideration to water resource management
New woodlands in the uplands should be created with equal benefit to the environment, economy and society
New woodlands in the uplands should be planted with consideration to climate change
The tree planting consultation process between landowners/farmers, advisors and governmental departments is not good enough
New woodlands in the uplands can positively contribute to alternative and renewable energy sources
More woodlands in the NCA would negatively impact tourism and therefore the local economy
We need more resources on the ground for helping people get into woodland planting in the uplands
Planting trees in the uplands of the NCA is difficult.. There are so many opinions and values.
Economic incentives for tree planting are too low
Tree planting incentive programmes (grants/schemes) are too complex
There are concerns about uncertainties, such as payments, risk of planting failures and impacts
A big barrier to tree planting around here is the disagreement amongst ourselves/stakeholders
There is not enough information given about tree planting opportunities
Opinions towards woodland creation are heavily influenced by managers, agents and regulators
Opinions towards woodland creation are heavily influenced by family members, friends and neighbours
New woodlands in the uplands could help with creating a timber resource for the future
New woodlands in the uplands should be coniferous for production and the economy
New woodlands in the uplands should be mixed species and multifunctional
We should promote creation of productive woodlands in the uplands, as this provides employment opportunities in remote rural communities
New woodlands in the uplands should be native species for wildlife and people
New woodlands in the uplands would be beneficial for nature, wildlife & biodiversity
Enough is already done to protect and enhance the upland environment
There has been too much planting of woodland with native only species
More woodland in the uplands would be beneficial to the hill farmers in terms of caring and shepherding for livestock, shelter and shade
We have worked so hard to make the uplands suitable for farming… seems a real shame to now change that back
More woodlands would negatively affect the way of life for people deriving a living from the land
New woodland could help diversify the income to a business relying on upland areas for income
There is little consideration to landowners/managers/farmers trying to make a living from the land
More woodland in the uplands could encourage more outdoor leisure activity
The rights of people to enjoy the beauty of the landscape is more important than making profits from the land
It is important to have woodlands in the uplands – it is good for our mental and physical health
More woodland in the uplands would help in creating a sense of wilderness
Increasing woodlands on the fells of the NCA would negatively change the identity and local cultural heritage
I support creation of new woodlands, but it has to be done in tune with the landscape
The characteristic landscape of the fells in the NCA would be ruined if there were more trees up there
The use of the land for pastoral farming is more aesthetically pleasing than woodland on the fells
Woodlands should be planted with future generations in mind
A lot of the recent planting in the uplands has been of scrub species… It's no good for man nor nature
I am concerned about a negative irreversible change in land use that tree planting would entail
We have enough woodland in the uplands of the Howgill Fells NCA
Tree planting schemes are too short in duration
When planting trees in the NCA, we need to respect the rights of the commoners/landowner
Some woodland planting in the NCA is ok, just not too much
It is a waste of time planting trees up on the Howgill fells - they will struggle to grow
It is difficult to combine the management of upland farming with woodland creation on the fells of the NCA

Appendix B: Pen portraits

From the ethnography
(These correspond to the WW1,2,3 series of video diaries)

Respondent 1

A is a teacher she lives in DH2 and is 43. On her days off she goes into the woods and walks with her two children. She lives in a peri-urban area and enjoying having it on her doorstep. She gets very stressed and has found the woods helpful as a keyworker during Covid.

They like points where they look out to fields. The children love the trees but like to have a destination which is where the stream runs through and they can play next to it. They like to go to a rope swing and have a paddle in the stream. It is shallow so she thinks they are safe. There are some problems with local kids setting fires.

The daughter's favourite thing is the scenery and watching the wildlife having fun. The son like the nature and the wildlife.

She does a second video which is next to her mother's house which is pine. The children like the pine cones and they always stop by a field to look at the horses. The woods are between housing but you 'wouldn't know they were there.'

Their focus is on the walking but they notice a lot of fallen trees from the storms.

She is very conservative with her tree planting in the tree planting games.

Respondent 2

W is an OT. She lives in NE17 and is 63. On the day she went out she wasn't feeling that great and wanted to cheer herself up. The woods she goes to everyday are Milkburn woods, Durham Wildlife Trust. She has to get in a certain distance before the stresses of the outside world fade away.

The woods are mainly pine which she thinks is okay but would like more variety. She loves the hidden features, where the wilderness has grown over some old derelict houses. The catkins and a singing blue tit caught her eye and hear.

It's very quiet and peaceful in the woods and she hardly sees anybody. She's notices some change where the woods have been thinned out which she thinks is positive because there is more light and she can see through the trees. This also makes her feel a little safer as a lone female. Although she mostly goes with her dog for company this is still an issue.

She likes the entrance to the woods which is more open with Silver Birch and it slowly comes to a 'secret' path that somebody made to go into the pines.

For variety she goes to Chopwell Woods and also feel safe here because there are more people. She like foraging for making eg an

autumn wreath and so goes to Chopwell to get oak leaves for her artwork and to see different types of trees.
She goes regularly to 'The Land of Oak and Iron' for the café and meeting up with people but doesn't think of it for trees.

Respondent 3

R is a student who is 19 years old and lives in DL5. She likes to go out into the countryside but doesn't really have the time because she works and is at Uni. In lockdown a small group of friends went into the countryside to make an effort to stay in touch. Just when she has spare time.

She has a woodland walk on her doorstep in Aycliffe. There isn't a massive amount of woodland space in the south of the county of Durham. 'We need to plant trees to 'convert Oxygen'.
She tried a new walk with a family friend in the Beamish Valley.

They liked the 'V-shaped valley' and a beautiful river. There was a variety of density in the woods. She thought it was maintained because of the posts and signs in the woods. She likes it when trees are more spaced out because the light gets in and she feels safer.

She really enjoyed it but unfortunately after the storm there were a lot of trees down blocking the path. She heard birds but didn't see any.

Respondent 4

D works as a letting agent. She lives in Bagworth/Coalville, The National Forest and is 43. Having moved from Buckinghamshire two years ago, she thinks there are not enough trees. Her relative teases her when they visit that there are no trees! She has an allotment, kids, and two dogs. She is very interested in wildlife and mentioned several birds she has spotted on her walk.

She explains that the NF has tried to rejuvenate the old pits. They used to live in Wendover which she thinks is quite coniferous. They often meet her parents in Conkers.

She likes wildlife and where you get trees you get wildlife and dens etc. The kids always congregate around a tree. Her favourite woods are bluebell woods with Oak and Hazel but she thinks the 'well-behaved' trees serve a purpose.

Two solar farms, an Amazon warehouse and an Aldi have been built so hundreds of trees have been planted, which she thinks is good. It is not lovely broadleaved woodland but it is over the road and people use them.

Mostly she wants wood for wildlife and recreation. She loves the green spaces on the edge of the village walkable from the front door over the railway line. On her walk she mentions that it is a great green space and makes the differentiation between 'well behaved' trees and the more wild trees where the scrub has grown up to house lots of 'critters'. She still likes 'the well-behaved trees'

newly planted to encourage wildlife and point outs some space/field 'scrub' that could also be planted up.

She thinks that trees could be everywhere but then modifies this to say there are other forms of carbon sinks. Let that be moorland, let that flood.

They also go to Bagworth Heath Woods 2 mile away for more flora like bluebells for example. Her daughter collected frogspawn. She is interested in buying some fields with her pension to plant trees or have a solar farm.

Respondent 5

L is 50 and a customer service assistant living in a village. She says there is so much choice of woodland in the National Forest and there are misconceptions about it. It is more than a few trees along the motorway. People do still think that but really isn't her experience of living in the area at all. She is all about the outdoors.

She takes us to 2 types of woodland in her video, including a colliery regeneration site owned by the woodland trust. She loves birdsong and water pools, streams or water of some sort. Occasionally she will go to Cannock Chace which is more pines. *If you go on holiday in Scotland, you can't avoid it!*
It can look brutal when it is cut down but it's got its place and has it's job to do.

There is so much choice she says here with nice mixed woods and woods which she calls ramshackle. There is an old colliery site she goes to done by the Woodland Trust which has explanatory boards and walkways. He noticed aspects such as fungi and moss on her walk and even spots a tree creeper.

She has now noticed near here that a landowner has bought some land to plant a wood which will have part access but that will partly be cut down. She doesn't mind as long as it is communicated to her in advance that this is going to happen. She found out from a nice pamphlet put through the door. They are going to make it accessible to local people there are individuals that see the potential to create a resource.
Trees, the more the merrier!

Respondent 6

T likes to go to her local place Charnwood Water with her partner. She calls the woods her special place and thinks trees are important for the environment. She notices trees being cut down for road building and also things that more planting could happen everywhere. Places to stop and do things like having a picnic or feeding the ducks or sitting on a bench are important to her.

She liked variety in the treeline, in particular when looking from a distance to see trees of different heights is important. She prefers other seasons really but in the Winter it is good to have some conifers for interest not just deciduous. They both like to see popular trees in the mix because they look like feathers. Weeping willows are another favourite because they look more naturalistic.

The shape of trees is important to her especially when branches come low down because it feeling more natural and forms a cave-like environment that she appreciated. She doesn't want woods to look managed.

Her and her mother often seek out forests further afield.
She would plant trees everywhere except moorland and farmers' fields.

Tree planting games:
She broke up the horizon on the North York Moors. She would plaster things with trees but it's not a good idea to completely change a habitat like that. Some randomly placed trees. The odd broadleaved trees for animals to shelter
In the Ingram valley, it was a matter of breaking up the squareness of the plantation, rounding of the edges and making it look more natural

Filling in the gaps of the fields in farmland.
Cover the open bit with tree to make flooding less of a problem for the houses that are behind there
Fenland, lining any other bits of the river. It does look like quite a nice open vista, so not too many trees.

Respondent 7

T is 35, a music festival organiser. He and his wife bought some land in a co-operative moving from London to Devon with their kids. They are currently living in a yurt but are doing up an old

water mill, they like to live sustainably and have planted some trees themselves.

It is a long-term project and they are all happy where they are. They earn money at festivals in the Summer but the Winter is harder. They love the woods and care for the trees, making logs for the woodburners. More woodland would be nice but Exmoor is beautiful. This more heavily wooded that where they used to live near Brighton.

In the Summertime they are in the stream a lot with the children and they use canoes.

Always more trees please, is his mantra. Fields look empty and her wouldn't hold back on planting.
The children love the 'deep dark' woods done by the timber trade all packed in tightly and ecologically it is a bit dead and a dry floor. They are woodland enthusiast or hobbyist and my try to acquire the land and rewild it with a glade or log out some bits. Plant other deciduous trees. This would create more diversity to have local natural trees rather than spruce for production and they're roots are shallow.

His wife is looking into doing a course with the Woodland Trust and the Children's Forest came to plant trees in their field. When it came down to it in the tree planting, he didn't just put trees everywhere.

They have clashed a little with the farmers who felt that rewilding was 'anti-farmer' but they just like trees. There are so many empty

fields for sheep and cattle to graze in but because they recycle them around it seems pointless.

On the tree-planting games: Moorland: He liked the bare ruggedness of the heather but didn't want anything to tall maybe some scrubbiness.
"Just thicken out the hedges and smash them all in there. Encourage people to stop flaying hedges and doing the traditional laying of hedges."

Respondent 8

R is a civil servant, 63 and is relatively new to Exmoor having moved to look after his mother. He enjoys the landscape but thinks it is overly managed. He is not a fan of conifers and likes open spaces but believes that we have to do everything to get to Net Zero. He likes to do a different walk every time he goes out.
He didn't feel very expert doing his walk but he liked the variety in the walk. The thing that appealed to him was the view at the top which is like common land: 'A great empty space' which is quite a rarity. He also like that there is more wildlife down in the coombe. He has only been in Exmoor for 2 years and there are people who have been here for generations and really understand the landscape better than him. His is a City boy originally.
"There are miles and miles of heather-covered moor like Dunkery and then steep sides coombe. It is never flat!"

He likes a woodland walk the most, through a mature woodland rather than a plantation. Do landowners plant for their pensions? He believes that Exmoor is managed to within an inch of it's life and

doesn't have many really wild places. *Everywhere you look, things have been made to look like that. It takes a while to realise it isn't as wild as you think it is.*
He feels that landowners are planting non-native species in rows to make money.
He admires a famous estate in Sussex where they just stopped farming and what happened amazed everybody. He heard about it on Radio 4.
He doesn't want to be idealistic or sentimental but believes that rewilding would never happen in Exmoor.
"It is all farmers and hunting and gun shoots around here, so things won't change. People should step back from the exploitation of the land."
"All I do is walk, it is other people's job to conserve it and manage it but things looking untidy wouldn't bother me."

Respondent 9
B is a project manager, 30 years old no kids. She teaches Pilates and is environmentally quite switched on. She and her Mum did a regular walk of theirs in North Devon. They regularly go to Exmoor as she works from home and needs to escape. She tries not to use the car and the woods are quite nicely tucked away. A nice circular route away from the traffic.

Her walk was very varied with fields and lanes and kissing gates. It was hard for her to tell the different species. Conifers were to the left and further back. Quite nice having a valley with a lot of holly for making wreaths. The stream at the bottom of the woods made her feel relaxed. She says it is all natural and nothing manmade.

There is a lot of building and development but she has seen people investing in land for rewilding. Investing in Orchards is a thing as well. People are looking at the environment a bit more. People are wanting that view again now because there is so much building going on in her areas

She likes to drive to Lynton, Lynmouth and Porlock where she finds it is more wooded eg, at Horner woods. She thinks she is quite lucky and there are many options but locally she would like more trees really. She is vegan feels that land is flattened for farming whereas before it would have been trees and scrub. Began vegan is a lifestyle choice she says but her self-confessed 'soap box' is that farming changes the landscape.

She is aware of the reintroduction of Beavers and the North Devon Biosphere. There are a lot of organisations trying to protect the beauty of the landscape.

On the tree planting games, she put copses along the bottom of the moorland valley and a couple of single trees scattered for variety.

On the moorland a scattering of trees, leaving natural space for growth and heathers.

She was one of the only respondents to plant in all of the fields. Spacing out three or four trees on the River Brett to give space to grow.

Fenland, she put a row of conifers at the back. Mixed trees scattered.

Appendix C: Research Sample

Sample Point	Method	Sample Jobs, postcodes
Durham	Younger online group (6)	DH8, NE16, NE41, DH7, NE20, DH9 SEG: B, B, B, C1, C1, C2
	Older online group (6)	DH8, DH8, NE16, DH7, NE18, SR8 SEG: B, B, B, C1, C2, C2
	Mixed creative session (6)	DH8, DH2, DH1, DH9, DH7, DH9 SEG: B, B, B, C1, C1, C1
	Ethnographic depth/video (3)	DH2, NE17,DL5 SEG: B, B, B
National Forest	Younger online group (6)	DE11, LE12, DE11, DE6, LE11, DE12 SEG: B, B, C1, C1, C1, C1
	Older online group (6)	DE22, DE13, DE13, LE12, LE67, ST14 SEG: B, B, B, C1, C1, C1
	Mixed creative session (6)	DE73, DE12,DE11, DE15, DE73,LE67 SEG: B, B, B, B, C1, C2
	Ethnographic depth/video (3)	LE67, DE11,LE11 SEG: B, C1, C2
Exmoor	Younger online group (6)	TA4, EX32, EX36, EX34, EX34, TA24 SEG: B, B, B, B, C1, C2
	Older online group (6)	EX16, TA24, EX31, EX31, EX36, TA24 SEG: B, B, B, C1, C1, C1
	Mixed creative session (6)	TA23, TA24, TA4, T A22, EX32, TA23 SEG: B, B, C1, C1, C1, C1
	Ethnographic depth/video (3)	EX16, TA24, EX32 SEG: B, C1, C1

Appendix D: Final Discussion Guide

Perceptions of Landscape Change
Online Focus Groups 1.5 hours
Residents and Users of 3 study areas

Respondent background

- Introductions, background to individual, household make-up

General awareness/experience of woodland and forests, excluding Country Parks (adapt to the Area)

- When/where and how do they use woodland and forestry locations? What is/is not important to them? (see, smell, hear, feel)
- Where locally are the places that are meaningful to them and why?
- When thinking of particular views of the landscape, that includes woodlands or forestry, what do they like/dislike?
- Are they aware of these local places (National Forest, NECF, Exmoor NP, Land of Oak and Iron)? Any engagement, particular perceptions?

Awareness of change in woodland and forest (unprompted)

- Over the years, have they noticed any changes in W&Fs generally first and then in the local context (eg National Forest, NECF, Exmoor)? What kind of change do they notice, if any? And over what kind of period? Any of the following:
    - more woodland/trees
    - less woodland/trees
    - tree planting/planting of woodland
    - tree clearing

    - change in the shape of woodland
    - planting of more native trees v coniferous or vice a versa?
- Are there any types of change that they consider beneficial or detrimental and why? Are there good v bad examples in their view?

General Perceptions of woodland creation/tree planting

- How do they feel about the idea of increased woodland/forests in their local landscapes or in landscape they visit? What sources of information are used?
- What are the perceived reasons for planting more trees/woodland/forests? (Probe media)
- Do they feel there would be any impact on them or their appreciation of the landscape?
- Where can/can't trees/woodland be planted? What matters to retain and what not? (Examination of landscape-scale maps)
- Do they have any concerns or hopes about potential change in the following?
    - the beauty of the view
    - variety/simplicity in the view
    - openness/enclosure
    - ability to see geological or archaeological features
    - impacts on wildlife/biodiversity
    - recreation?
- Does acceptability depend on the accessibility of the woodland? Why/why not?

Perceptions of woodland creation/tree planting (Location)
[Ask spontaneously, then with images e.g. 'before/after'

- Do perceptions change depending where the woodland/trees are planted? (Probe acceptability)
    - infill into existing woodland
    - on farmland where there are fields and hedgerows

– on fells or hillsides
– on hilltops
– on flat land
– moorland
– near towns and villages
– in valleys
– on floodplains
– other?

Perceptions of woodland creation/tree planting (Design)
[Ask spontaneously, then with images e.g. 'before/after]

- Do perceptions change depending on the scale/amount of the woodland? Why/why not?
- Does acceptability depend on the density of the woodland? Why/why not?
- Does it depend on whether the woodland blends into the landscape by:
  – being in keeping with the spirit of the place
  – being designed to match the contours of the land (hillsides)
  – matching the local distinctiveness of the landscape
  – following the field patterns
  – naturalistic planting, (what does this mean to people?)
  – the shape, straight edges, scalloped edges, rewilded edges?
- Does it depend on the species that are used for the planting or having a variety? Broadleaf/Conifer/Scots Pine? Why/not?
- What are their responses to using new species visually eg Wellingtonia, Paulownia? Because they will capture carbon more quickly?

Perceptions of woodland creation/tree planting (Management)
[Ask spontaneously, then with images]

- What effect do management techniques have on their perceptions eg large scale felling, tree covers, any mitigating factors, staged planting, look of interim period?
- What do they think of rewilding versus planting as a way of increasing the number of trees?

Climate Change and the Tree Action Plan
[Explain the Tree Action Plan]

- Do they see and appreciate the environmental benefits and efforts to counterbalance the effects of climate change ie. too much CO2 in the air?
- In terms of future climate change, how do they feel if in the longer term the landscape starts to change in its appearance?
- Do they appreciate the aims of their local places to increase woodland cover, create community engagement, joint stewardship? Show publicity/websites etc (National Forest, NECP, Exmoor)
- In case not already mentioned, what are their influences (Countryfile, National Trust membership, Jeremy Clarkson)?