

Perceptions of Woodland and Landscape Change Research Report A Northumbrian Case Study

April 2023



This report has been produced for the Forestry Commission by The Research Box, an independent research and insight consultancy. For further information about the document, please contact:

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Perceptions of Landscape Change

Full Research Report

1.0 Background & Methodology

Following the Perceptions of Landscape Change research commissioned by Forestry Commission and conducted in 2022, some further work was conducted in Northumberland in 2023 as an extension to the project.

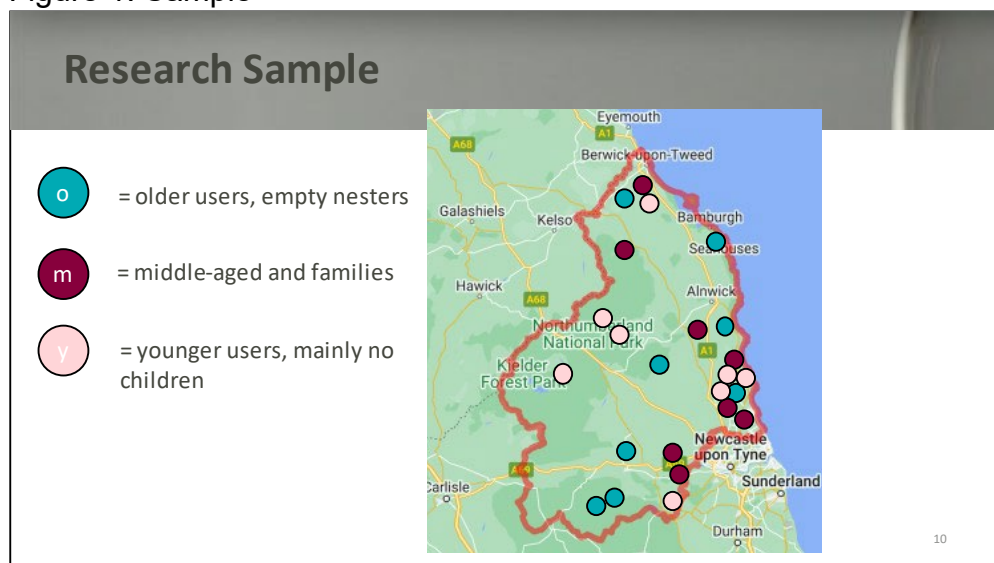
The main objectives were to pick up on some of the recommendations from the last study. The main ones being to:

- extend the sample to another case study area
- look at more targeted visualisations
- examine age groups more closely
- include people who were not particularly users of woodland.

The case study area of Northumberland was used with three online focus groups held with a young, middle and older age audience. People were recruited following Market Research Society Guidelines to be members of the public with varying use of the countryside across the County. The groups were held in February 2023 and lasted 1.5 hours each.

A detailed recruitment questionnaire was used to screen respondents and ensure a demographic mix. Figure 1 shows a map of where the participants lived around the County. It demonstrates that a good spread was found across the east coast to the west and north. A slight concentration in the south east as is consistent with the conurbation of existing population.

Figure 1: Sample



2.0 General Findings

2.1 Perceptions of Northumberland

Participants were very happy to be living in Northumberland. They particularly enjoyed the quiet emptiness of the countryside, although this had been disturbed recently by new people coming in during the Lockdown, a number of TV programmes and the rise of tourism both domestic and international.

The benefits of getting out into the outdoors were exercise and relaxation:

“I like going up into the hills as much as anything but one of the advantages of living where I live in a tiny valley is there’s quite a lot of steep walking that I can do around here so I do the Hadrian’s Wall path and I’ve done the Pennine Way and things like that.”

“For me it’s just getting that headspace, just that peace and quiet of not having two children gibbering at me and just quiet, no sound, peaceful.”

The variety of the landscape in Northumberland was very much appreciated with the contrasts between the coast, farmland and fells being valued.

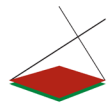
“The contrast between the coast, moors, woodlands, everything. I’m completely spoilt here because we have the beauty of obviously the forest itself which goes over to the Blanchland Moors and to Derwent Reservoir and I’m very lucky”

“For us, it’s a range, we can be by the beach in 20 minutes or we can be in the forest in another ten minutes, or if you want, we can be up a hill in literally half an hour or so, we’ve got, depending on what the weather is doing, we can pick and choose what we want to do.”

Wide open views were liked and some mentioned a lot of Northumberland was treeless, eg the Coast and the Moors. Others thought that there was a big difference between the east and the west of the county with regard to tree cover.

“I just think that the fact that we, it’s quite a large county as well and because we have lots of farmland and lots of hills and other areas where there isn’t so many trees, it possibly makes you think that we don’t have a lot of trees, but I think we, we probably do in comparison to other counties.”

Kielder Forest was important for recreation and a dominant feature of the County. Various locations used for commercial forestry were noticed and aside from those who stuck to the Coast was quite top of mind for people in their thinking



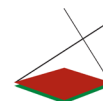
about the countryside. Some negativity is expressed about it but also a few highlighted that the industry was becoming more diverse in their planting.

The coast was a key anchor for some who didn't go inland as much as some of the others. One participant valued the water because he lived on an island:

"I prefer the coast, but then yes, I don't have much option living here, but I do like to go fishing as well, so it does help being by the coast and sort of, yes, I've access to friends' boats in the harbour, so I can go out on them as well.

History and heritage were raised as being special with many castles, Hadrian's Wall and the industrial heritage features from the iron, coal and lead mining industries. Folklore and stories surrounding particular places, like Holywell and Green Dancing Hill was a facet for a few in making their outdoors experience colourful and resonant.

There was mention of the sandstone hills and ridges being valued for climbing and walking. Great Wanney and the Ingram Valley were highlighted. The views in general from various places up to the Cheviots were considered to be highly important for most.



2.2 Attitudes towards Trees, Forests and Woods

Very similar to the 2022 study, there were many positive attributes associated with being in woods and forests. This sample however gave more emphasis on open space partly because they had not been recruited to necessarily be users of woodland and partly because the County was quite associated with it.

“I personally would normally go to how isolated it is and how, how sparsely populated it is and hilly, but I suppose, yes, woody wouldn’t be the first thing I mention.”

Positive mentions of local woods were as follows:

- Positive woods, Castle Hill Walk, Thrunton woods
- Wooler Common
- St Cuthberts Cave’s but the woods are nice
- Slaley woods
- Kielder Forest (although also negative)
- Druridge Country Park
- Bothal
- Tranwell.

Although some of these include coniferous trees there was much criticism of Sitka Spruce and commercial forestry.

“We are in mourning for real woodlands”

“Yes, yes, is it’s all like forestry as in spruce trees packed in tight together and very boring. I mean, I find it as a landscape, quite oppressive, you know when you go into the forests, just how dark it is underneath them, because of how tightly packed, whereas you go to the, where I call the back end of Thrunton Woods near Callaly, where you’ve got the ancient hill fort and it’s more of an ancient woodland rather than a managed forest. I think that’s a much nicer environment and landscape.”

The processing plant in Hexham was well known and awareness of coniferous forests was high in the County compared to other parts of England. A few begrudged the fact that trees were cut for chipping, having grown for so long, rather than being used for full planks or staying as ‘wood’. This was noticed by seeing piles of logs marked with the word chip ready to go to the processing plant.

“I can understand that you would shave the edges off and maybe chip that, but the actual core of a big massive trunk, to just chip that to go into either chipboard or biomass, I think, ethically, just sticks in my throat a bit, that one.”

Some gave the counter argument that the industry is important for jobs and helps the UK to be self-sufficient.

“I think you know, it’s clear that that is part of the industry up here and I think that’s really, has to exist doesn’t it, you know, so, but of course a mix woodland alongside is just the ideal, but if you know, you’ve got to recognise that there’s an industry here and it’s an important part of industry, more than ever and jobs are so important.”

Participants felt lucky to have access to several Forestry England sites, such as Slaley and others. Aside from such sites, a few people thought that there wasn’t that much access to the land because many forests, woods were privately owned.

Positive change that participants had noticed was that commercial forestry was now being planted in a more mixed species way. Trees were always quickly re-planted after harvesting and seemed to soon grow, surprisingly some thought.

“I have noticed along with the commercial planting that there has been more diversity in the planting. More native species appear to be – particularly on the edge or at the front of commercial plantations and that’s something I’ve noticed over recent years actually, yes.”

“We’ve seen the Slaley Forest plan and they’re forward thinking and they’re really considering the thing that everyone’s saying about, you know, not just planting conifers and more, you know, they’re trying to think about returning back to native land.”

A few had noticed that some hedgerows were being re-instated. Trees being planted on farmland was brought up as a change but there was a query as to whether this was for carbon off-setting farms for large corporates which seemed to be disapproved of.

Clear felling to some was still often a shock as it comes without warning. Those who were not originally from the County were more upset about it using emotive terms for the post-felling scene.

2.3 Perceptions of Forest and Woodland Creation

Participants discussed where they would like new trees, woods and forests to go. A default position for some was that trees can go anywhere:

“I can’t imagine there being anywhere that we wouldn’t particularly want to see them.”

However, when asked about the specifics, they did seem to have preferences, mostly in favour of woodland creation:

- along rivers
- on the edge of towns and villages
- near new housing development
- for flood prevention
- as community forests and orchards
- in the south of the County
- for better wildlife corridors
- to protect exposed farmland along the Coast
- as a way of extending existing woodlands and forests.

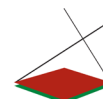
“I would like to see more residential planting, you know, in the villages and things like that. We’ve got a lot of green spaces which four times a year the Council come and spray with weedkiller and leave it in brown dead strips and it’s like, you know. I mean there’s a couple of areas just off my street where there’s two seats that face a road.”

Planting on hilltops was not preferred, largely to maintain the viewpoints.

“Yes, I’m just worried about some views being spoilt by you know, what, you know, right now you can be standing on, standing somewhere with a really nice view, I don’t know why, but I’m thinking like sort of West Woodburn area. Nice views, oh you can see forever. Or on the top of the Wannies or you know, that sort of thing, you can see forever. If that was surrounded by trees, that view would go.”

There were concerns about land being taken out of production of food in order to plant trees.

Northumberland was felt to have a heritage of commercial forestry which people understood, although they wanted some more native woodland to be planted. Often when talking about tree planting, they are wanting native deciduous.



Storm Arwen had greatly affected perceptions with people feeling upset that woodland had been lost and they were hopeful that it could be replaced with greater species diversity.

“The devastation of that and it was devastating. It was so, so upsetting to see so many trees down and damaged and I’d like to see yes, if they can be replaced but replaced with native trees.”

“Yes, Storm Arwen’s definitely affected my walks lately because of my location. [Thrunton was] a big one for me so I’ve been finding it harder and harder to find other walks. I can’t say I’ve noticed any planting around here but a lot of our villages nearby are getting extended with building.”

One positive had been a particular diversion off Hadrian’s Wall where the footpath now took people through a previously unencountered perceived to be ancient woodland. However, in contrast, some private estate and landowners had been slow to open-up footpaths again so access had not returned to normal there.

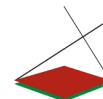
Despite some of the comments about lack of access, there was not too much of an issue with new woodland creation not being accessible, if others were. People accepted that sometimes nature needs ‘to be left alone’ and that some planting was ‘just a crop’.

There were a few concerned about a grant system to farmers if it were not integrated with other partners such as the water companies and councils or if there was not community buy-in. Many were concerned about the loss of productive land for food if farmland was planted. The usefulness of wildflower meadows for wildlife was also mentioned as if their introduction might be threatened by some of the tree planting schemes.

The coastline was valued by many as being without many trees and some were concerned that might change. They felt that inland locations were better for trees. These tended to be places where they had already seen planting, for example College Valley, Wooler Common, Slaley and Allendale.

“I’m not really into the trees and things, it’s more once I’m in the water, I’m fine, but I don’t, I wouldn’t like you know, things like Bamburgh Castle and things like that to be over covered by trees around it because that is such a landscape on its own. I think there’s so many places that could be better planted. Smaller hedges, bushes, yes, that kind of thing, fantastic.”

“It would be weird to see wooded areas along the coast, never really associated our coastline with trees. And the moors, it would be weird seeing trees there.”



Some distinguished between the north coastline and the part south of Amble where some historic industrial activity had meant the landscape was less 'natural' anyway. There was room for both trees and openness and the ex-mining parts had already been planted but with 'deciduous' and this should continue.

Consideration should be given to where archaeology might be, people thought, although sometimes thinking of commercial forestry. Some places felt like an anathema to think of woodland creation, such as on Holy Isle, where there were continual archaeological digs being undertaken. It was felt that the exposed nature of such site would not allow any type of trees to grow. The northern part of the coast was considered by some to have more features to protect like, stone circles and iron age forts.

People agreed that there should not be a 'one size fits all policy' and it should depend on whether the landscape was hilly, a valley or fields as to what type of trees were planted. Otherwise, *'we might as well go and live in London!'*

"Depends on where it is, if it's in river valleys and close to towns, you know, deciduous woodlands would be, would be a boon for me all day long, but I think if they were, if they were up on, up on top of the moors, which they wouldn't really plant most of these trees, like birches, something like that, then I think they do take away some of the value."

"I love the open spaces of you know, of the national park and having a whole, you know, go to Kielder for that kind of thing, I don't need any more kind of spruce kind of trees along there, but yes, around villages and loads of new builds and along the very agricultural coast line, where there seems to be no trees, or in my head, there seems to be no trees, and for more protection for wildlife and for the birds, that would be a complete plus for me, but not, not in the big open spaces, no."

2.4 Responses to planting The Dodd

Participants had been sent in advance of the focus group, a baseline image of The Dodd (Figure 2) an upland landscape with a valley and river showing in the valley bottom and no trees currently.

Figure 2: The Dodd Baseline image



They were asked to place trees by drawing or using google highlights where they felt it was acceptable to plant trees. Figures 3-6 show the results of these drawings. Most were happy for some trees to be planted but the majority were in favour of minimal or cautious planting. Some planted quite sparsely leaving the hillside free of trees and some planted three of the hillsides but left the background one because it looked interesting, craggy and better without trees. There were worries about damaging the soil if it were evergreens:

“I’d be happy with native evergreens so Pine but not the dreaded Sitka Spruce and just the, you know, the wall-to-wall dark green Conifer, commercial crop. It’s just, you know, it’s a difficult balance I suppose but we need more deciduous stuff – trees.”

“I live near Kielder Forest in Northumberland and when it was the largest manmade forest in England and when they were planting the trees they filled it with conifers and it’s ruined the soil quality, so yes.”

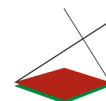
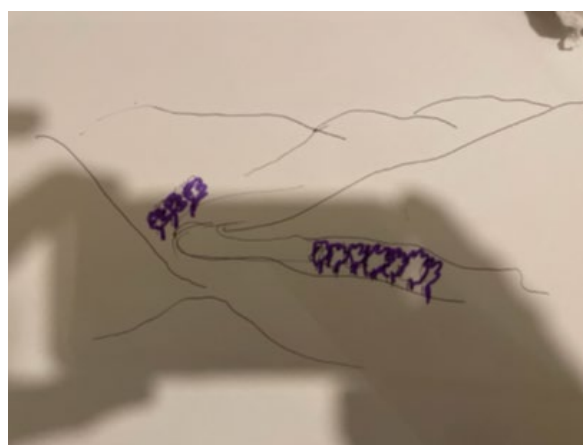
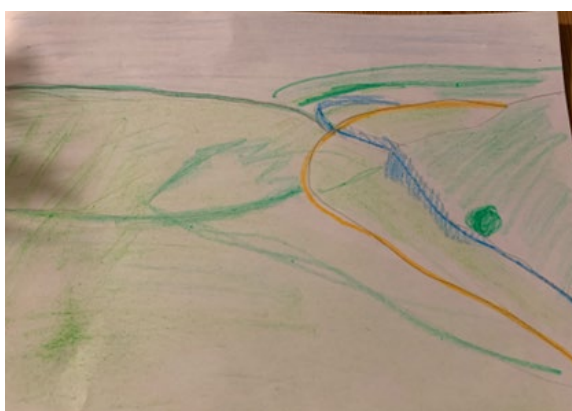


Figure 3 shows six examples of people (2 per age group) who did not plant the baseline image or who only planted very sparsely in the valley bottom.

The reasons given were because people wanted to retain the openness and be able to see the landform. One person knew the land very well and pointed out that there was enough forestry further on in the valley. Some people were inherently conservative or wanted the land to be grazed as was their heritage.

Figure 3: Minimal Planting examples, Top 2 younger, Middle 2, middle-age, Bottom 2, older age group



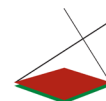
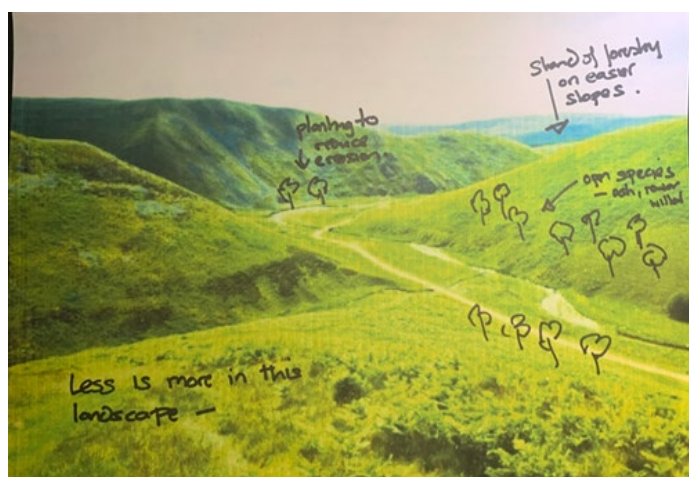


Figure 4 shows six example of people (2 per age group) who chose to plant The Dodd with a little more coverage but further up the hillsides. Still nothing planted on the top or on the background hillside. Most are deciduous although one is coniferous.

Figure 4: Cautious Planting examples, Top 2 younger, Middle 2, middle-age, Bottom 2, older age group



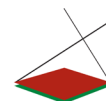
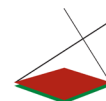


Figure 5 shows four examples of people (1 in the middle-aged group and three in the older group) who wanted wider coverage, more mixed planting but were more sophisticated about positioning trees further apart from one another and creating some sort of pattern within the valley. Here two people tried to plant near the top of the background hillside. These people more interested in the aesthetics and more likely to say they like to just sit and look at the landscape.

Figure 5: Patterned planting, Top 1 middle-aged, 1 older, Bottom, 2 older group





Finally Figure 6 shows four examples of people (1 in the middle-aged group and three in the younger group) who were more liberal with their planting and gave fewer caveats on how it should be done. They were often more ecologically minded and wanted to achieve more environmental benefits.

Figure 6: Extensive Planting, top 1 middle-aged and 1 younger, bottom 2 from the younger group



2.5 Responses to all visualisations

2.5.1 The Dodd

Subsequently, participants were then shown the full set of four different landscape ‘visualisations’ around the County (including The Dodd) and asked to comment upon the increased levels of tree cover options presented on their screens.

The places shown were as follows:

- The Dodd
- The Vale of Whittingham
- The Sandstone Hills
- A coastal steading shelterbelt.

The Dodd ‘after’ visualisations are shown in Figure 7 below in the order that they were shown. The first baseline image is the upland valley without trees. The second image is filled with trees on a third of the lower right-hand slope and a quarter of the lower left-hand slope. This image was broadly acceptable to most people although looked a little tightly packed.

“I can live with that one.”

The third image has over half of the right-hand slope covered included the profile of the hill but with the top empty, the left-hand and background slopes are covered slightly less than halfway up with uneven edges. The response to this was that most felt it was too much planting with the right-hand side edge being too straight ‘like Forestry Commission planting’ and the fact that the side of the hills was covered. Their preference was for planting to be lower down they thought.

“Yes. I wouldn’t mind having more planting on the right-hand side hill and less on the far hill.”

However, when seeing the fourth image, many, especially in the younger group voted for this because it retained more of an element of ‘naturalness’ because it was broken up and looked like it was in the crevices of the background slope which was more ridged. This meant the interesting shapes of the far hillside could still be seen.

“I wonder whether it actually affects the scree on that slope and whether or not you can plant on it without taking away the character of that hill.”

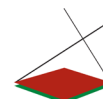


Figure 7: The Dodd visualisations, baseline plus three changes as described in the preceding text



2.5.2 The Vale of Whittingham

The Vale of Whittingham visualisations are shown in Figure 8 in the order they were shown in the focus groups. The baseline image first and an increasing amount of cover in the subsequent three images. The landscape is agricultural with low rolling field divided by hedgerows. There are a few farm buildings, a few small woods, distant views of higher hills in the background and a road in the foreground.

A few people knew the area quite well having driven the road many times. The landscape was highly valued as farmland pasture and for the hedgerows by several although others thought of it as a place to walk and connect with the countryside. When asked where they would plant most felt that the hedges could be repaired and that field corners could be used for planting:

“Field corners, you know where, for example, when the plough turns around the corner by a gate or something, there’s always an odd little bit left, he can’t get right in with great big modern machinery. There’s usually little corners and verges tucked away.”

“Absolutely love the view and I think the hedgerows are just really distinctive in this one aren’t they, so and they’re not that distinctive along a lot of the coast, a lot of the views for agriculture land, so that’s, I love the hedgerows on here.”

The first and second changed options, with more fields planted up following field boundaries were not liked because they gave a ‘checkerboard’ look to the landscape. Words like ‘uniform’, ‘manicured’ and ‘manufactured’ were used. If the area was to be planted the final option looked better because it was more joined up. However, for most, apart from the younger group, it was too much of a step to change the character of the Vale and to lose land that was perceived to be producing food. Some thought it would be better to have larger stretches of woods rather than the patchwork so that larger stretches of green field together could be seen.

In the end, the older and middle-aged groups wanted to stick with the original view whilst several in the younger group took the final, fourth option with the most amount of trees but which looked less ‘blocky’.

“It’s a bit better, but from our viewpoint it’s still got a very patchy feel to it, it’s very, it’s very patchwork and some of them are now darker green than lighter green, but it’s still that very, I don’t know, it doesn’t feel quite organic when you look at it.”

“To me, it ruins the landscape and it’s, it kind of wastes the fields, they could be doing more than having a forest, there’s better places to plant.”

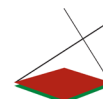


Figure 8; The Vale of Whittingham visualisations, baseline plus three changes as described in the preceding text.



2.5.3 The Sandstone Hills

The visualisations for the Sandstone Hills are shown in Figure 9 as they were presented to the focus groups. The baseline image shows rolling hills with distant views a featured hill that has a conifer plantation on the top to the right and small remaining conifer strip on the left along dip slope of the hill.

The baseline image was felt to be ‘quintessential’ Northumberland and a scene they were very used to. The remaining woods on the top of the hill were very common but not regarded as particularly attractive and some derisory comments were made. One person described the look of it to be like a ‘Mohican’ haircut. Others were relatively neutral about them but thought they were abandoned and had often questioned whether they were going to be left permanently or going to be taken down eventually.

The first change shown was to enlarge both plantations with curved edges but not joining them up. Participants were happy with the change but felt it still looked a little artificial.

“I’m happy, yes but the general consensus is that the more shape you put in to the thing, the better, a nice shape. If you’re going to plant on the top of the hill, make it look like a hill.”

The second change was felt to be an improvement, ‘more natural’ on the first and the baseline image because it flowed better and linked everything up. It did not impinge too much on the field in the foreground, and planting in the valley bottom and connected on to the landscape left and right. It highlighted the shape of the hill and left a remaining open space on the top to one side. These things were felt to be important. Most people preferred this option the best, although one person was concerned that there was no fire break or a way through with a tractor.

“It’s softer. It’s not a solid edge so there’s, you know, again the graphic has its limitations but you can see different shades and little pockets of dark and lighter green so I’m assuming that means they’ve staggered the edge and they have actually opened up the planting of it.”

The third change extended the woodland to cover the foreground fields coming back up the valley. This appeared to be too much coverage percentage wise although it looked like the planting in the valley and the field was a different colour to that on the top and therefore might be deciduous, which was more positive. However, only one person voted for this option. The character was changed because the undulation of the land between the viewer and the hill couldn’t be experienced as well as before and there was a loss of openness.

“It takes away from the wildness of, well, I think it just takes away from the Northumbrian-ness of it.”

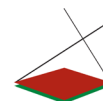


Figure 9 The Sandstone Hills' visualisations, baseline plus three changes as described in the preceding text.



2.5.4 A Coastal Steading Shelterbelt

Figure 10 shows a farm building or steading with some trees behind at to the right. The second visualisation presented increases woodland all along the back of the building and around the left-hand side of the building.

The second image with the woodland wrapping all around the farm steading was regarded as acceptable although the change looked a little dramatic it was extending existing woodland. There might be a benefit to this type of planting elsewhere, to screen 'ugly farm buildings', people thought. It was presumed that it would help the farm to be more sheltered. Also, a few thought it made the building look more 'cosy'.

Participants did not think this type of planting would affect the view to the coast and in any case, a few argued that from an ecological perspective it was not about the view.

"It just occurred to me that our objective in nature is not to, in my head anyway, it's not to get the best view of the ocean, it's to do what's good for the land there. Yes, because ultimately, we're not putting these trees in to make it more aesthetically pleasing, that's not the aim of it is it?"

The fact that some of the fields had been taken out of arable use was not brought up as an issue. The proportion of the field taken was considered acceptable and possibly the farmer was going to 'farm' the trees instead which was their choice.

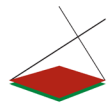


Figure 10, A coastal steading shelter belt with baseline image and one change as described.



3.1 Overall Synthesis

There was an essential perceived emptiness about Northumberland that appears to be threatened a little by increased planting in people's minds. Trees were certainly regarded as better than increased development, solar panel farms or wind turbines. There was a considerable difference in people's minds between native tree planting and permanent woodland creation and commercial forestry, each being appropriate in different situations. Any 'push-back' seemed to be most related to more large-scale planting of commercial spruce.

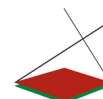
Woodland creation should enhance the views whilst maintaining the essential perceived character of the landscape. People are assessing the amount of open space or 'green look' left within a view and using that to extrapolate to a wider area. If they agree to an amount of trees in one view, did that mean that would be applied everywhere? On the whole people seemed happy with a 10% uplift but when half the picture gets filled it seems too much.

The 'character' in most cases was often the landform or topography being exposed or the ability to see rolling hills. The agricultural nature of the vale was important visually but also culturally. Those preferring to stick to coast were less engaged imagining that the planting would not affect their watery/beach experience whilst still thinking that trees would look 'weird' there.

Younger people were less enthusiastic about large-scale planting than in some of the other 2022 sample areas, (although this cannot be fully ascertained without being measured quantitatively). This is in part relating to a reaction to commercial forestry. They were more likely than older people to find the removal of fields for livestock acceptable but still debated within their generation about whether farming was a tradition to uphold and how forward looking it should be. Clearly farming communities within the County are regularly in discussion about such things. Community involvement was considered key as to where places were planted if to be large scale.

Smaller scale types of planting were considered largely acceptable. Hedgerow trees, scrub, small coppices, sensitive agroforestry, shelterbelts, riparian planting all likely to go under the radar. With the caveat that people liked to see rivers down in the valley from high up.

The previous research suggested that the generations were different in their attitudes towards increased tree cover with the younger ones preferring more and the older less. However, this pattern is different with more of a spread of attitudes within each age band.



The attitudes types developed in the previous research seemed to be a better way to describe people in this sample as opposed to age band. Certainly, in how people chose to plant up and how they responded to the visualisations, eg:

- Resisters; very few, but wanted no change
- Status Quo+: quite a few of these want minimal planting
- Hopeful pragmatists: ditto
- Enhancement champions: interested in planting to enhance the beauty of the landform
- Wildlife connectors: wanting planting that creates wildlife corridors
- Eco-imperative drivers: want comprehensive planting to help with climate change.

The design of woodland creation comes out again as being important with the ragged edged and more dissipated approach of the final visualisation in the upland valley being preferred because the landform could still be appreciated.

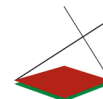
In the Sandstone hills 'taper and flow' was considered important whilst the Vale of Whittingham proved to be more controversial generally with some polarisation of views. However, there was an agreement that the middle way options were not preferable, leading to an 'all or nothing' conclusion by some.

The flowing and joined up nature of the planting in the second visualisation in the Sandstone hills was preferred although it was comprehensive planting. This was because it brought out the shape of the hill and people were quite positive that it was better than the orphaned conifer wall that existed currently. It is possible then that the more organic shapes of the planting can extend people's propensity to tolerate larger-scale planting.

Following field boundaries was not popular visually within the Vale of Whittingham visualisation as it resulted in a fragmented view and two lost elements (1) green expanse (2) hedgerows. Although, hedgerows can still be experienced next to woods by driving along them, they appear to have more appeal if on the edge of a field not a woodland. Shaped planting in fields was preferred in an agricultural landscape as demonstrated in the final shelterbelt visualisation in the arable field with the scalloped edge.

The responses around commercial forestry and coniferous planting are interesting because there are signs people have noticed some UKFS changes in the planting with some awareness that forestry is more sensitive generally. But participants in the study still felt the need to promote more planting of native woodland. Those living in more coastal areas were less worried about forestry thinking of it as something that happens elsewhere in the County.

There was an undercurrent that people should be involved in local decisions about planting with a concern that it wouldn't be properly co-ordinated within the



Country because of all the different interests at play. The grant system of paying landowners to plant trees might not result in effective or sensitive planting they thought as potentially farmers wouldn't look after them. Some were suspicious that dictates about tree planting would come from Government without thinking of the particular local situation each time.

Participants in this study were looking for woodland creation still to maintain diversity within a landscape in order to have a mixture of trees and open grassland for example. Diversity of landscape character within the County had been valued, giving variety and choice of outdoor experience but woodland creation or more particularly forest creation triggered an anxiety about everything potentially ending up looking the same.

The research here is a small sample of three focus groups but it is intended to link in with the other six from the sample in 2022 and much of the findings echo responses from that time. However, there are some timing and sample point differences, outlined below between the two years:

- Climate change didn't seem to hold sway as much this time
- Air quality in Northumberland was considered to be good already
- More defensiveness around food security and farmland as a result of the Ukrainian War and cost of living crisis
- Strong farming culture/heritage
- Effect of Storm Arwen; conifers were lost, which many regretted
- Less talk of lockdown and desperation to get into woods
- Northumberland perceived to be quite 'wild' already
- Some mistrust of Government using Northumbrian land.

3.2 Implications

The implications of this small piece of research in connection with the previous research are that when taking public perception into account, new tree planting at scale does not receive widespread support in uplands and on agricultural land. Northumberland is currently regarded as having much valued openness in the landscape.

Preferences are for:

- Distinctive crags and higher hills to be left
- Planting to be lower down slopes
- Shaped edges
- Mixed planting
- Farmers not to plant whole fields
- Farmers to be encouraged to plant joining up with any neighbouring woodland
- Lower hills can be shaped with planting in swathes
- Open space
- Shelterbelts are accepted
- Riparian
- Urban fringe, amenity.

Changes in forestry practices have been noticed as positive. Increased tree planting will be resisted by some but is sold by others on climate change mitigation, increasing wildlife corridors and enhancing the beauty of some landforms. Support is less conditional and very positive when the 'trees outside woods' and urban fringe options are discussed. More conditions are placed by the public on the design and location of woods, the larger scale they are.