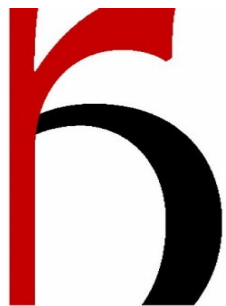
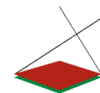




Great Northumberland Forest Stakeholder Research Report April 2023



This report has been produced for Land Use Consultants by The Research Box, an independent research and insight consultancy. For further information about this report, please contact:
Alison Fleming
Director
The Research Box
E: alison.fleming@researchbox.co.uk
T: 01453-836341



Title: Great Northumberland Forest Stakeholder Research

1. Introduction and Methodology

This report forms part of a commission given to Land Use Consultants by Northumberland County Council (NCC), specifically The Great Northumberland Forest (GNF) team to:

- review existing Landscape Sensitivity Assessment information in relation to trees/woodland
- conduct research with stakeholders into areas of consensus and differences
- the preparation of visualisations.

The overall aims of the project are to help inform the GNF and the Woodland Creation Partnership (WCP) on tree establishment and woodland creation in the area through a landscape lens.

The findings reported here are the independent stakeholder research element which The Research Box were invited to complete.

A range of County stakeholders were interviewed from a supplied list including:

- Woodland Trust
- Northumberland National Park Authority
- Forestry Commission
- Northumberland Coast AONB
- North Pennines AONB Partnership
- CONFOR
- Northumberland County Council.

During February and March 2023, nine interviews were completed in total using qualitative research techniques. The research method was through confidential online interviews lasting up to an hour each and recorded. Interviews were analysed using 'grounded theory' approaches where the content is organised according to emerging themes and hypotheses generated by stakeholders.

Stakeholders responded based on their current job role and remit within the County. The questions asked came from the brief to consultants and subsequent verbal briefings. Topics were built around individuals' particular expertise and specialisms. The findings represent the views of stakeholders.

2. Research Findings

2.1 General Outlook

The research shows high levels of stakeholder engagement with the GNF programme and positive attitudes are expressed towards its aims and objectives. Although there is a spread of opinion about forestry and woodland creation within the stakeholder group, they all agree with the partnership approach and believe there are opportunities to be had. This includes for GNF to be a 'broker' between the various stakeholder interests in the County as a whole, starting conversations and raising awareness. Most stakeholders are particularly interested in the disparate, mosaic-style approach to woodland creation that is being suggested and are supportive that continuous forest is not an end goal.

However, stakeholders do not believe that there is much consensus amongst professionals within the County as to how to proceed with woodland creation. Some see it as a polarisation of view simply because there are *"people who like trees and people who don't."* Others see tensions caused through the existence of processing plants in the County. Some stakeholders experience a professional consensus about planting trees but say there is disagreement on the 'how' and that it boiled down to how dynamic professionals believe landscape character to be.

2.2 General Attitudes towards Planting

Most stakeholders are in favour of increased tree planting given the 'menu' of different definitions of woodland available. However, across the spectrum of stakeholders, there are a few who question whether Northumberland is particularly 'treeless' in the first place, compared to the national average. Some stakeholders counter the perceived high amount of existing cover by not including the percentage of coniferous forest within the total amount. Different stakeholders pick different points in history highlighting varying levels of tree cover in order to make their point one way or another for increased woodland cover or not.

Differences occur on the scale of planting needed but there is agreement on the complex nature of the sensitivities involved and, on the mantra, 'right tree right place, right reason'. According to some the interpretation of this can be too subjective and needs definition, whilst others believe it allows for a multiplicity of views. Most stakeholders want to see a bespoke approach to planting depending on the surrounding landscape and with the aims of furthering ecosystem services. A few stakeholders push back on planting per se in their patch, seeing a need to protect habitat, peat, wading birds or landscape character. Others, prefer a 'casting of the net wide' philosophy and working back from there.

“There is broad agreement that right tree, right place, right purpose. That is a very broad statement. If you put me in a room with 10 Foresters, we would probably all disagree on what species we would want to put in! because it is that subjective and we want to plant the trees. Down to the detail is always going to be different.”

“Right tree, right place, right reason...but to a forester, Sitka Spruce is the right tree.”

There is stakeholder buy-in to and support for UKFS as an improvement generally. A few are concerned that the minimum percentage of ‘open space’ is too low. Tree densities could be too high when the number of plants is a target rather than hectareage. Some stakeholders expressed that planting should be more ‘in natural clumps’ rather than in ‘geometric’ shapes across the County.

The location of commercial forestry should be appropriate, for example not on deep peat or on the coast. Most stakeholders take a pragmatic view about the existence of coniferous plantations but a few are more vocal in their criticism. Those with a forestry background want to point out that commercial forestry can work with nature, for example because animals use it for shelter. Curlew breeding sites and forests are not necessarily mutually exclusive with one example of curlews breeding next to coniferous being given. Another stakeholder posited that the national guidelines make it difficult to plant even broadleaf in priority habitats, especially regarding curlew

breeding grounds but that local knowledge can have a more sophisticated understanding.

“It shouldn’t be a blanket ban on planting trees where there are curlew, it is more subtle than that and the (local) RSPB feel the same.”

The majority of stakeholders want woodland that is in keeping with the landscape, following character and landform. However, a few argue that sometimes landscape character acts as too much of a block on planting for a couple of reasons (1) the argument was made by a few that woods as a crop were going to be removed and so may only have a temporary effect (2) landscape is ‘dynamic’ in its essence and so should evolve. This latter point does not mean that planting should not be in keeping with character and form, just that planting could be more ambitious, rather than restricting itself to being very limited.

The general stakeholder view is relatively cautious with sensitivities being key even outside of protected landscapes. Several stakeholders wanted planting to be as site-specific as possible. Finding niche pockets and ways to introduce trees is important for example in the AONBs and the National Park rather than having expectations of high increases in tree cover. Species such as Rowan, Willow and Alder being more likely here.

A more comprehensive, larger-scale approach could be taken closer to the conurbations. The opportunity for woodland to improve air quality near towns, deal with carbon offsetting for new settlement and development shelter is regarded as important. The large area of green belt is felt to be a potential focus as openness is not defined by trees but spatially by lack of housing. Accessible community forests, woodlands, country parks and orchards are worthy of promotion especially in the South East of the County, to further local government objectives for wellbeing and access to nature, especially since the pandemic. Small groups of trees in peri-urban environments should also be promoted. The key land use study also sometimes recommends where the edge of settlements 'would benefit from shelterbelt planting.' Haydon Bridge was mentioned.

Regarding the location of woodland on farmland and agroforestry, a great deal of stakeholder concern is around the difficulties of encouraging farmers and landowners to come forward in the first place. A discussion of these barriers is dealt with later in the report but several stakeholders believe that the conversation with farmers and landowners needs to start much earlier than talking about actual scheme detail to just open up the thinking. Farmers/landowners that have already approached stakeholders are of a more enlightened mindset, motivated by eco-system services and will naturally come forward. However, stakeholder experience is that the environment is not the primary motivation for tree planting.

A stakeholder recommendation is for the planting of riparian corridors as a basic network which works with landform and other character features. This appears to be more relatable to many farmers being often easier for farmers to contemplate initially, sometimes also with wilded edges, as a starting point. Similarly, ghyll planting is regarded as appropriate in upland areas and moorland fringe.

A 'shade and shelter' approach is also an easier target for farmland, especially the more coastal, as is the use of rare unproductive land as a starting point although this can also be where the unknown archaeology exists. A few stakeholders also feel that landowners will now look at more resilient shelterbelts, in the wake of Storm Arwen and that more farms might now consider installing them from scratch in exposed situations for storm protection generally.

Where there are 'no mappable constraints' a few stakeholders would prefer that the interests of biodiversity, ecosystem services and nature recovery should be prioritised over how the landscape looked visually. Land on the designation fringes was a possibility to consider for planting for example along the Tyne Valley up to the National Park.

Stakeholders are invested in trying to find places to introduce trees, and to enable applicants where possible. However, having targets for 'plants in the ground' is not helpful; it is more about instilling a positivity around tree planting and having the conversations. Over time, embedding the idea that

tree planting is a long-term land use change is suggested by some stakeholders. However, those dealing with farmers, push 'farming' trees for profit as a more immediate way of keeping their motivation going. One argument made for harvesting trees was that there is a finite period in which a tree does capture carbon anyway.

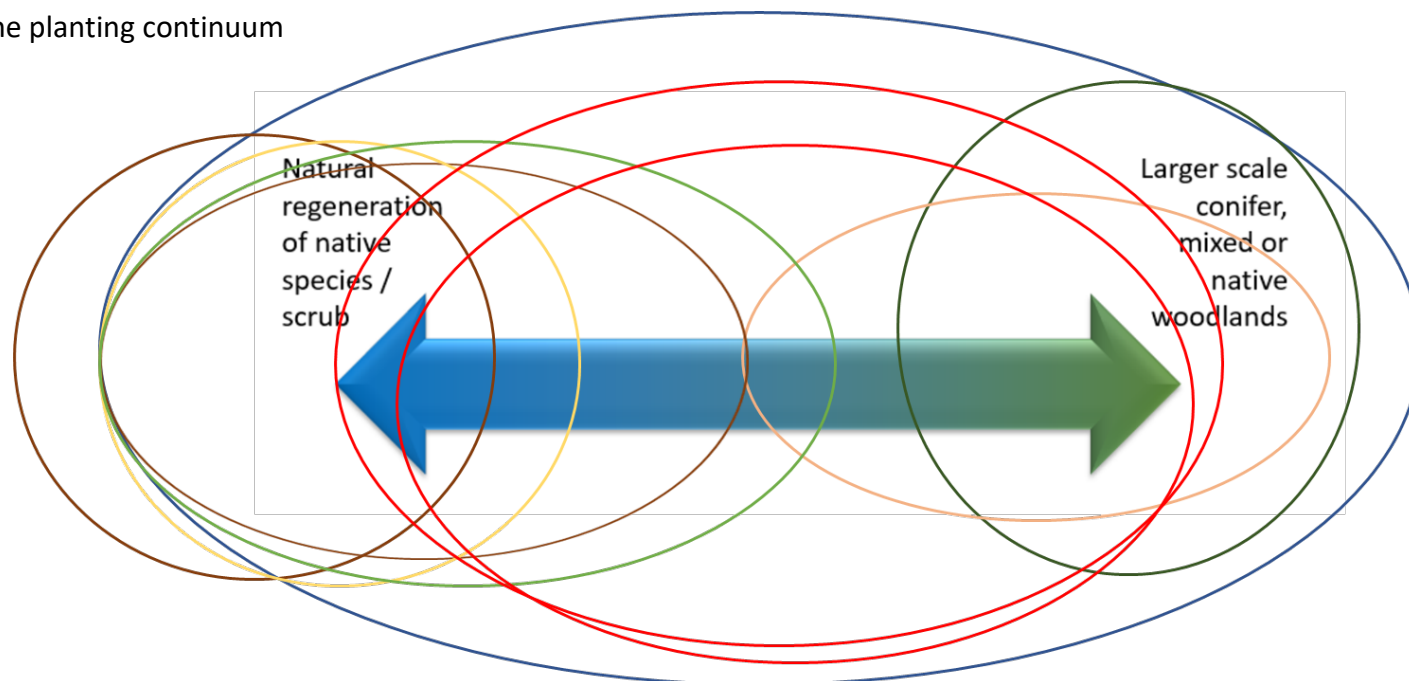
Figure 1 summarises where stakeholders lie on a continuum of tree planting types. From their current remits and the territory they cover, there was a spread of those who are only looking at the natural regeneration side, those who are mainly commercial and those who want all types to be considered. It shows the different angles that stakeholders come from.

"Nature first is the way to go"

"The natural regeneration will fall foul in years to come. We end up with all birch or all willow scrub. We can't replicate what nature did over 100s of years. Mother nature hasn't read UKFS. If I let Sitka spruce regenerate it would out compete everything. It sounds fantastic but it won't achieve what people want it to achieve.

"Monocultures of sitka spruce; you should take a different approach to that. It is a commercial crop and it is no different to talking about a field of barley or oil-seed rape."

Figure 1: The planting continuum



2.3 A landscape-led approach

Stakeholder recommendations are mostly for a landscape-led approach, allowing the landscape *'to point you towards the sort of planting you should be doing.'* Those who wanted ecology or nature to be the key driver acknowledge that the landscape might lead to the same outcome:

"See the landscape as a palette and do what is appropriate in landscape management terms, minimising the risks that tree planting can do."

"If it is landscape versus nature recovery, I am nature recovery all the way. If it is appropriate to plant trees for biodiversity but it will significantly change the look of the landscape that is fine with me."

There is a concern expressed by some stakeholders that current grants could be too prescriptive and this did not help to design with landscape in mind. They called for more flexibility on % scrub and % open space allowed. Being too prescriptive could also deter people from applying.

As previously mentioned, a few stakeholders prefer to see landscape character as fluid believing that 'spirit of place' just evolves with the changes that are introduced. Others were more conservative in wishing landscape character to take the lead. Using the landscape character assessments is useful especially with an analysis of the 'Protect, Manage and Plan'

descriptions that can help to identify locations for tree planting.

"If it says 'plan,' you can pretty much change things. If it says 'manage' you might be more just adding more incrementally to things. if it says 'protect' then you are really talking about not changing very much."

2.4 Landscape Impacts

The key enhancing effects of woodland creation that stakeholders put forward were in the various eco-systems services of biodiversity, nature recovery, flood alleviation and soil protection. In addition to this are the economic and social benefits of farmed trees and community woodlands giving employment and amenity value respectively.

“It is about putting trees back into the landscape in such a way that they benefit society and ecosystem services are maximised.”

There were enhancing opportunities in restoring hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Woodland creation could enhance field patterns and potentially enhance landform.

Enhancing the ‘*nativeness and naturalness*’ of the wooded landscape could result when replacing and maintaining existing woodland plantation, for example when making reparations after Storm Arwen. Enhancing the landscape will also occur when increasing existing ancient woodland and connecting them to other isolated ‘islands’ of tree cover. Although it would need to be recognised that, to some members of the public, the islands might be part of the character perceived.

Most stakeholders feel that the enhancement potential for biodiversity of increased native/ mixed woodland cover is

enormous, especially if it was about ‘*fewer trees more woodland.*’ Some stakeholders say any type of tree cover would be beneficial to wildlife, enhancing the movement of animals generally.

It is agreed that increased tree cover would have an impact on the landscape visually and that there should be more communication to the public about this potentiality. Most stakeholders would like a balance to be struck between protecting key views/vistas and appreciating that some views/vistas will change. If some views/vistas are avoided for tree planting, then trees would have to be planted elsewhere anyway.

Stakeholders with a more purely ecological viewpoint and those with a forestry background are less concerned about protecting views/vistas, although there was recognition that Northumberland relies heavily on tourists who expect certain views/vistas. The landscape sometimes would dictate the views anyway insofar as, summits, ridges and crags would not be appropriate for planting due to having blanket bog or not supporting most tree species. Likewise, areas on the coast and islands would not easily support many types of tree planting, especially on the Whin Sill.

“There are some views which are worthy of protection but there is room in Northumberland for an awful lot more trees that would improve our quality and perception of the landscape.”

Views or vistas should be protected where communities were passionate about them and where they contribute to the character of Northumberland as being *'the land of far horizons'*. The ability to see from one end of an open landscape to another is important and potentially part of its natural beauty eg:

- from key upland high points
- from one end of The Commons to the other
- along the coast from north to south and vice a versa.

The impact therefore of many types of tree planting could be quite negative if it is regarded as an open landscape. For example, when the landscape character assessment states that there is an open treeless character. Therefore, the landscapes with an open character would be impacted in terms of their perceived 'sense of place' and for this reason the stakeholders responsible for such landscapes are mindful of keeping planting to a minimum and using low impact tree types. It might be that some protected landscape characters could evolve over time with a recognition that a slow introduction of tree cover would be 'accommodated' by people, but that seemed a long way off.

Stakeholders highlighted various views that are important:

- Peel crags and Sycamore Gap
- Steel Rigg
- Cheviot
- Yeavinger Bell

- The Whin Sill
- Heritage Coast
- Islands
- Parts of Hadrian's Wall
- Lead mining
- Views into and out of the approaches to historic towns and villages
- Allendale Common vista from one end to the other
- View of Coquetdale
- HW across Kielder tree Canopy
- Pre-historic sites on the Kyloe Hills
- Views from the A1 to the Sea
- Views from the rolling hills just inland from the coast to the sea
- The Castles.

On private land, where there is not public access, some viewpoints would not necessarily need protecting. Scheduled Ancient Monuments would be protected themselves but would views across to them. Views from significant rights of way would need protecting.

A survey or report on key vistas could be commissioned to allow schemes to identify any important views/vistas. At a smaller scale, this is done on a case-by-case basis anyway but it may not account for cumulative effects on a larger scale over time. There was some existing material on this in the Local Plan although designed to help with development

planning could still be useful. (Part A of the Key Land Use Study done for visual impact of the wind farms from service centres of Wooler, Rothbury etc)

Key heritage features would need to be seen from a distance but also, in some cases, being able to look out from the feature would be important. Where people stood in the past surveying the land can be important for people to experience now unless it is already obliterated eg by a motorway.

On a site-specific basis, the County historic environment officers could help with examining where viewpoints are important. The visual interpretation of any site historically relies on understanding hidden features, eg through LIDAR in order to gauge what else might be significant more widely than the obvious feature.

According to some stakeholders, there is leeway around planting near or on unprotected historic features, where they are significantly degraded, or where the roots of the species planted would not damage it or woodland might act to preserve the site.

2.5 Combining NCA/LCA Mapping

There is a reluctance amongst stakeholders to combine LCAs or NCAs beyond some of the current shaded categorisations. This is because there was only so far that plans should be made from a desk-based scenario and that the tasks were often so site specific that that was important to bear in mind. Others feel that too much categorisation might put constraints or targets at too large a scale when everything should be considered. Despite this, one stakeholder suggested that moorland fringe and upland fringe could be treated in a very similar way and that is what they were starting to do. Another thought that the Green Belt could be treated in one way.

Otherwise, sensitivities could be at a very local level, even field by field, especially regarding breeding birds where desk research data did often not reflect the reality. Also, experts in hidden historic features could spot where trees can and cannot be planted more subtly on site than what might at first appear with high level mapping data.

“There’s room for lots more trees in Northumberland. Try and get them in where you can. You shouldn’t focus on areas.”

“It’s a useful layer but it all needs ground-truthing anyway.”

“I don’t take a lot of notice of NCAs. If I am doing a scheme I would expect NE to tell me what I should be doing and shouldn’t be doing.”

2.6 Woodland Types

Some stakeholders have ‘no go’ areas, for example, with commercial forestry and would often not go much beyond natural regeneration or ‘assisted’ natural regeneration in:

- Blanket bog
- Deep peat
- Wading bird habitats
- Protected landscapes.

Although most of the above were mapped with constraints that stakeholders tended to agree on in an ideal world, occasionally there might be some ‘wriggle-room’.

The larger scale native or conifer woodland was preferred by those in the forestry world, looking for a product. Some of these land-use interests were felt to be too large-scale to be within GNF’s remit, although they could play a partnership role.

Coastal and coastal plain sensitivities were high according to stakeholders with some differentiation being made between the coastline itself and the agricultural plain behind it. Despite restrictions there is still a need to reach nature recovery targets and look at furthering a mosaic of habitats. ‘Within’ Coast AONB options might be:

- wooded denes
- Howick and Embleton
- shelterbelts
- riparian scrub
- orchards, early pollinators
- hedgerow trees
- ‘shrublands’ (scrub)
- visual intrusion planting (caravan parks).
- field corners
- replacement trees
- *up-catchment planting*
- *nutrient run-off planting*
- short rotation coppice for wood fuel.

Non-AONB opportunities for woodlands were, north of the Coast AONB towards the Scottish Border, and south of the Coast AONB in Druridge Bay or for amenity woods generally.

Moorland and upland opportunities were in assisted scrub regeneration, ghyll planting and wood pasture. Ghyll planting was beneficial but would still need ground truthing eg for water voles and ring ouzel. Even scrub on scree could be considered to improve soil quality perhaps. The users of some moorland or upland for grouse shooting would not favour any tree cover to a height where flight patterns would be affected or the sport would be disabled through lack of visibility of the target. Ancient hefting patterns for upland sheep farming could also potentially be disrupted.

Agricultural land being highly valued is discussed elsewhere with not much beyond the 'trees outside woods and existing woodland extension' being considered (1-6). Some of the highly fertile areas on the plain were particularly hard to imagine with woodland because of the heritage. It was pointed out that some coastal areas were experiencing soil erosion particularly on arable land which could be planted to slow this down.

"Where conditions are less, that is some of the most valuable agricultural land in the County so it would never be profitable or suitable for woodland planting. You wouldn't take that land out of production if you were a farmer and we probably wouldn't support that either in term of landscape."

Some stakeholders found that the food security argument was used as a 'wall to hide behind' and pointed to research indicating that a certain % reduction in grazing would have minimal impact on food security. Differences in agricultural land in Northumberland are noted between East and West.

The development of a South East Northumberland Wildlife Network would benefit from trees for increased green infrastructure plans between areas of population.

2.7 Scheme Design & toolkits

Stakeholders state that, outside of those who had already come forward for woodland creation projects, land owners and farmers need warming up with general awareness raising, myth-busting and engagement campaigns/strategies.

They see barriers to planting coming from the farming community which need overcoming. There should be messaging to overcome farmer concerns, including the financial motive as a key driver. Little is known about the upcoming agri-environment scheme changes and this is compounding reticence. Uncertainty re ELMs and in the policy framework generally is a factor in encouraging doubts.

Eco-system services as a motive for planting is not regarded as a primary selling point for all farmers but it can be more for general landowners. Whilst younger generations of farmers are more interested there is often a multi-generational structure meaning that practices do not move on.

“The ones who approach us do understand, and they are often the younger generation whose parents wouldn’t necessarily. Mostly when landowners talk to us, they define it as environmental, some might define it as biodiversity then add on a sort of amenity for the kids to walk through.”

The language used in any toolkit should be careful because the older generations can see some of the ideas as

counterintuitive to their understanding of land ‘management’. Planting trees or adding scrub where they had been cleared previously goes against the grain when memories of childhood tasks on the land are called to mind. The sense of farming identity can be lost unless the ‘new activities’; are re-framed in language that links them so, farming trees, wood pasture instead of woodland creation, even ‘shrublands’ instead of ‘scrub’. The term ‘rewilding’ is not popular amongst the community, although younger generations were getting inspired by The Knepp Estate book. Some stakeholders use ‘regenerative agriculture’ instead. Others say *‘it is a way of staying on the land’*.

“Net gain is aimed at the next generation. The average farmer owner is 50/60 and at that point they are not looking at Net Zero or what their carbon footprint is. Farmers are very traditional. The progressive ones are coming forward. We need to look at their children and grandchildren Look at the age demographic of extinction rebellion. Talking to a 60-year old farmer about 2050 that is a hard sell.”

“The trouble is that the farmers want everything neat and tidy so we need a PR campaign for scrub. Someone suggested we shouldn’t call it scrub we should call it shrublands. Shrubland sounds nicer. Farmers associate scrub with neglect: Oh, they’ve allowed the land to scrub up and it is now messy!”

Framing the activity of tree planting positively for farm owners had helped some stakeholders to overcome the more negative view that it is perceived to be taking land out of production. Riparian planting has been the way through here.

Stakeholders would like any advice to be user-friendly, aiming to de-jargonise some of the DEFRA and Forestry Commission language. Even some intermediaries, who would likely be consulted, find the processes difficult. *“We haven’t done woodland creation for years and now it’s all go!”* Whilst UKFS is a useful document and helps good practice, stakeholders say it is not for the lay person. They asked for the headings and strands to be ‘decoded,’ setting them out clearly for farmers and landowners.

“If I put UKFS in front of a farmer, it would blow their mind!”

“It would be really useful if there was a single place that told you about all the schemes that are available because the FC want to lead you through the process by the bullring but actually it shouldn’t be like that. Really, really basic and it needs to be in one place. There is nothing worse than navigating the gov.uk website to find CS schemes!”

Therefore, there is a need not to frighten prospective applicants off. Giving lots of signposting to data and information would be good for the intermediaries but some landowners, farmers might not see the subtleties of their sites and reject the idea based on the data they saw. If landowners have historic features or wading birds they might just discount

tree planting per se when there could actually be ways around it. Seeking personal advice was a clear recommendation from stakeholders to farmers and landowners through woodland officers, land agents or historic environment specialists. A list of such people should be provided.

Stakeholders providing advice to farmers and land owners find that tree planting needs to fit into the ‘whole farm model’ taking a step back to understand that first is important. Then ultimately the farmer/landowner needs to be clear about why they are planting, living a clear rationale and using key buzzwords for example tying it in with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Seeing tree planting as part of the farming business is important to achieve buy-in. This can be difficult if the financial incentive is not there for tree planting in the long term as well for maintenance eg cf wildflower meadows where the payment continues.

But the profit motive was strong, especially amongst the more affluent owner-farmers. For example, looking at the tourism angle, many farmers have holiday lets which could use logs for the wood burners or the woodland might provide additional holiday appeal, when close to the cottages for amenity or foraging. Fruit trees could provide fruit or jam. Shelterbelts might extend the season. Emphasising the fact that the ‘tree crop’ can be harvested by them at a profit, or by their children for more can be an appealing motive.

Other motivational factors are to do with land and livestock such as promoting the benefits of trees providing soil improvement, shade and shelter, leaf fodder or reducing wind speed.

“We have found that farmers are more interested in trees when you stop talking about it in terms of woodland but you talk about it in terms of wood pasture. So, trees with grazing. There is good research out there that says tree fodder is good for cattle it introduced minerals and nutrients that they wouldn’t get through grass.”

Species choice was another barrier to farmers who need some guidance here. Many now discount Ash, know that Oak is poisonous to livestock (even when they farmed arable) and realise that Beech would not grow in Northumberland. Applicants would benefit from a greater understanding of this element, stakeholders thought.

Several stakeholders thought that some of the current requirements eg to produce formal ‘Woodland Creation Plans’ or a ‘Forestry Management Plan’ were too onerous for lay famers and land owners, especially for those who wouldn’t be paying someone to do it on their behalf. A management plan, for example, could just be ensuring good health and safety. There is need to explain the basics eg of spacing and straightening tree guards later on but that it is all manageable:

“If the purpose is for diversity, biodiversity, just leave it.”

“They are refuges for wildlife. People can manage a small woodland. It requires a lot less management than people think. It is scalable to what people can manage kind of message.”

“In my view, and it doesn’t matter if it is only 2-sides of A4 start drafting a woodland creation plan. Capture your thoughts.”

It was felt there was a need for any proposed toolkit to handhold and demystify. To this end, stakeholders suggested various potential ‘how to’ guides for GNF to think about publishing, how to:

- Brief a land agent
- Write a woodland creation plan
- Write forestry management plan
- Create a photomontage, visualisation
- Navigate the FC process
- Desk-based research versus site-specific
- Do a whole farm audit
- Check wader zonal map and evaluate
- Do fencing for trees
- Get through a constraints check (MAGIC).

“Make sure the objectives are there, you’ve done your research and your data gathering then hopefully the landscape will point you towards the sort of planting you should be doing.”

“What are their objectives, what are they wanting from it and secondly it would be a case of helping them to understand some of the constraints and opportunities process. When you talk to most landowners, they aren’t aware of the forestry EIA process. Probably a general thought that you can put a tree anywhere without getting permission for it. Helping them to understand why they can’t do what they want to do.”

“I say remain flexible. You may start with a xxx hectare plan but someone will take a chunk out of it there and another chunk will go somewhere else but you WILL end up with something.”

In order for schemes to be accepted they need to have a number of hooks in them linked to government policy, as one stakeholder said: *“points mean prizes”* but often farmers just want to know *“how much am I going to get?”* or *“is it going to make me richer?”*

A few could be motivated by the ‘rewarding public goods’ model such as flood alleviation but without decent remuneration this is derided as helping ‘other people’ rather than themselves. Simply, pointing out that a mixed approach can be taken ie some as tree crop and some for biodiversity helps to encourage consideration. Mostly though, it needs to be a business decision:

“They are making a business decision. If we are talking private landowners, people seeing a benefit to their bottom line, hard numbers. A benefit in his or her pocket.”

A number of key points are important to those stakeholders reviewing schemes:

- Don’t follow existing field boundaries
- Combined schemes with an element of natural regeneration
- Mixed planting, species diversity and open space
- Planting which takes the landform in mind
- Follow the contours, position open space where appropriate
- Surrounding conifers with broadleaf
- Remain flexible
- Use photomontage or visualisations
- Design and mitigation regarding historic features.

A few stakeholders are against funding schemes with plastic tree guards and have themselves trialled various options with deer fencing, companion planting, willow pegging and increasing plant densities.

Another aspect of the design guide and the communication around tree planting was to normalise it, thus giving farmers or landowners’ ‘permission’ to step out from the crowd. Stakeholders believe that peer-to-peer word of mouth is incredibly important in preventing or triggering behavioural change and finding advocates with experience that other farmers could relate to in the form of case studies or meet and greet type events could work.

2.8 Future Changes and Activity

Some information is out-of-date here and there, for example, the National Character assessments. A few stakeholders would like them updated in an ideal world. Several stakeholders think they are workable as each case need 'ground truthing' anyway and in a way, it allows for the arguments to be made about the current state of play. A 'light-touch' updating could be valued.

Some current landscape material needed additions on:

- Resilience to climate change, storm, wind, wildfire, flood
- Resilience to disease
- Protection of soil.

Some information was now inaccurate eg on:

- Priority habitats
- Coastline change, habitats, placement of dunes, retreat
- Water catchments
- Ancient woodland
- Keys to the Past incomplete data set
- FC mapping tool sometimes too high level.

"The only thing we have got is the PHI it has a lot of errors in it. It would be great if we could have an upgrade. It's the quality of the data, not that it's outdated."

Some in-progress research is relevant:

- Visual character document from North Pennines AONB Partnership
- Map of Ancient woodland is being updated (to include woods under two hectares)
- SE Northumberland Wildlife Network.

Fresh spatial research could be conducted where there are gaps on

- Key viewpoints, valued vistas map, borrow from settlements
- Eyesores map
- Maiden trees or copses
- Treeline study like the Dumfries and Galloway pollen research.

Stakeholders need further time to think about how to assess the cumulative effect of woodland creation on the landscape over time. If it concerned visual effect, some fixed-point, time-lapse photography could be conducted at key points at 10-year intervals.

Other assessment ideas were:

- Community engagement feedback on benefits of woodland creation
- Link in with other monitoring of ecosystem services
- Link with the county council on blue/green infrastructure monitoring
- Future character assessments.

A few stakeholders were reticent for metrics on tree planting to be used favouring a monitor of GNF engagement with partners, landowners, farmers instead. It was also mooted that the percentage of tree cover should be broken down into coniferous versus native to allow for comparison with other Counties.

There is a view that GNF were already making great strides with communication and 'more of the same' in terms of events held to talk to farmers and landowners is suggested. In terms of the public, in some rural parts of the county the public and farming were almost the same, so the less populated areas could be done through the parish network. A different network might be needed for the more populated South East of the County. Community engagement has general support amongst stakeholders although a few find that it needs careful handling. A few would also want to include a schools' outreach programme to instil a love of trees for the future.

A farmers' and landowner survey would identify current attitudes and levels of awareness, as suggested by one stakeholder. As previously stated, a peer-to-peer advocacy programme is considered desirable. Developing some sort of segmentation of landowners would help to define the messaging and marketing strategy, recognising that there is a broad range of people in different financial situations. Some stakeholders favoured a stronger selling approach, treating potential applicants as customers, although the more subtle 'broker'/promoter of trees was also liked.

"Be brave, bold, pre-empt, pre-sell and manage expectations!"