

# **A Woodland Strategy For Bradford District**

(Final\_v4)

## Introduction

Bradford District is mostly rural and alongside its people it is undoubtedly our most valuable asset. By 2020 there will be more of us living in the district, wishing to work, find somewhere to live and places for recreation and relaxation. How we as a Council work with our community to make the best use of our natural resources to create both wealth and a quality place to spend our lives is our greatest collective challenge.

How we rise to meet this challenge is perhaps as important as the end result: two key principles have emerged over the past 20 years that inform how we respond. Firstly, economic development, indeed, any development must be sustainable. We know nature does not have an infinite capacity to provide resources or soak-up human pollution and that we have a moral obligation to ensure that our use of resources is not at the expense of future generations. Secondly, community participation in planning and decision making is central to meeting the challenge. The state alone at national or local levels does not have the capacity to solve every problem.

Public and private woodlands provide many benefits to citizens, visitors and businesses as well as being a vital component of our natural environment or “green infrastructure”. Protecting and enhancing the district’s woodlands against the background of climate change and the pressures of population growth within the context of a complex policy and regulatory framework is a challenge for all woodland owners and managers. The Council is in a unique position as the single largest woodland owner and planning authority to shape the quantity and quality of the district’s woodland.

The Council will be able to lead improvement in three ways. Firstly, through the strategic spatial vision set out in the Local Development Framework. Secondly, through the standards it sets for the management and maintenance of public woodlands. Thirdly, through the development of co-production models where the Council, local communities, private land owners and businesses work together to create sustainable, multi-functional trees and woodlands in the district.

Council Representative to be agreed  
(Leader, Portfolio Holder, SD, etc)

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## Executive Summary

A Woodland Strategy for Bradford is a strategy for trees and woodlands across the whole District. It replaces the Woodland Strategy 2002 and follows community consultation and 165 individual responses. The strategy will run parallel to the Local Development Framework covering the period up to 2028, with annual action plan reviews and a strategy review in 2017.

The Council's long term aspiration is to "create high quality, sustainable woodlands that meet the needs of people and the natural environment". The Council aims to do this against a backdrop of climate change, growing population, growing expectations and changing policies.

The Strategic Aims of creating a sustainable natural resource, challenging climate change, enhancing biodiversity, contributing to the quality of life and benefiting business will help the Council to realise the many benefits to be gained from developing a landscape rich in trees and woodlands.

Woodland cover in the District is below the national average of 10% but the Council as the single largest woodland owner and as the planning authority is in a strong position to provide direction and has a good record of engaging with community partners to deliver benefits.

Woodlands have multiple uses and provide multiple benefits from helping to prevent floods, capture carbon, provide a habitat or a place for recreation and education.

To deliver the strategy ten key woodland focused policies have been identified

- Create woodlands
- Improve access for all the community
- Protect and promote trees and woods in the landscape
- Protect and enhance biodiversity
- Adapt to and mitigate climate change
- Encourage and promote community participation
- Use woodlands to generate wealth
- Provide places for education
- Provide places for recreation
- Maintain the right tree in the right place

## **User Guide**

### **Purpose and Scope**

The purpose of the strategy is twofold:

- To provide long term direction for the planning and management of the public woodlands owned and managed by the City of Bradford MDC.
- To set out how the Council will work with other partners and stakeholders to improve the quantity and quality of all woodlands across the district

### **Timescales and Review**

The effects of this Woodland Strategy will not be fully understood in some case for 50-100 years when new woodlands have closed their canopy and attained some stature in the landscape.

The strategic spatial vision for the District, set out in the Local Development Framework runs to 2028.

Woodland Management Plans are being created now and will be implemented through to 2017.

An annual progress report will be made to the Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March with a whole strategy review in 2017.

### **Who is it for and how will it be used?**

The strategy will inform and orientate how the Council manages its trees and woodlands to support its strategic objectives. It will:

- Ensure that we work towards meeting national agendas and local corporate strategies and targets;
- Provide guidance and direction to managers and staff;
- Provide a mechanism for participation and scrutiny by others;
- Set challenging targets and a process of evaluating our success;
- Inform and shape operational delivery plans;
- Inform and shape woodland based projects and partnerships;
- Support external funding applications

### **How is the Strategy set out?**

The Strategy begins by setting out the Council's overarching Aspiration, Vision and Strategic Aims. Bradford District Woodlands and Our Community are thumbnail sketches of our woodlands and people. The Benefits of Trees and Woodlands and Challenging and Changing Times highlight the benefits and some of the challenges facing foresters. How Does the Woodland Strategy Fit is a brief description of how the policy framework and context is changing and Delivering the Strategy sets out key policies and the work the Council will put in place to move towards its strategic vision.



## Aspiration, Vision, Aims

### Aspiration

*“Create high quality, sustainable public woodlands that meet the needs of people and the natural environment.”*

### Vision

The Council will challenge itself to create a district where all citizens, visitors and investors are able to enjoy and benefit from a richly wooded landscape. Council woodlands will support and enable wealth generation and an improved quality of life, they will provide greater and more resilient biodiversity. Adapting the number and location of woodlands in the district will create a landscape more resilient to changes in climate and weather, such as flooding, whilst helping to mitigate climate change through carbon capture and substitution.

The Council will increase the size of its woodland estate by identifying planting opportunities within its land holding. These new woodlands will help to strengthen and reconnect older woods into a wider mosaic of natural spaces that comprise the functional green infrastructure of the district. The quality of the woodland estate will be lifted through quality management to internationally recognised standards.

Central to the creation of a larger, quality woodland estate will be the development of “co-production” models of benefit delivery: the Council, local communities and private landowners will work together to plan, implement and monitor woodland creation and improvement.

The District’s unique landscapes, heritage and biodiversity assets will play a vital role in making great places that encapsulates what makes Bradford so special.

## Strategic Aims

**Create a sustainable resource:** provide a tree and woodland resource on public and private land in places where they can contribute sustainable, environmental, economic and social benefits for the district now whilst safeguarding resources for future generations.

**Challenge Climate Change:** ensure that the Districts trees and woodlands are adapted to a changing climate whilst helping to mitigate its effects.

**Enhance Biodiversity:** encourage and support the protection and enhancement of woodland habitats and associated species and resources, including soils and water.

**Contribute to Quality of Life:** ensure that all members of the community living, working and visiting the district have opportunities to access high quality woodlands for recreation, relaxation and education.

**Benefit Business:** encourage and support woodland based enterprises that contribute to wealth and employment creation in the district.

## **Bradford District Woodlands**

The woodlands of any area are shaped by the landscape and by the activities of its people. It often comes as a surprise to learn that Bradford District is mostly rural in character. Two thirds of our 370 sq. kilometres comprises open moorland, agricultural grazing land, woodlands and greenspace. By contrast the remaining third is the former industrial City of Bradford and the major towns of Keighley, Shipley, Ilkley and Bingley where most of the population (77%) live.

The landscape character is diverse, ranging from a small part of the Yorkshire Dales limestone country to the millstone grit of the South Pennine uplands, linked to the intermediate Southern Pennine Fringe and the low lying coal measures of Yorkshire, Notts. and Derby. The lasting impression of any one travelling through the District will be of a largely upland landscape cut through by the river valleys of the Wharfe and Aire as they descend eastwards to the sea<sup>i</sup>

It is the upland character of the district – its famous moorlands captured in the novels of the Bronte sisters or the song “Ilkley Moor baht 'at”, and – the industries associated with woollen manufacture that have led to an area relatively low in “woodland cover”. Overall, the area taken up with woodland was 4.2% in 2003, compared with Surrey (22%) at one end of the spectrum and Lincolnshire (3%) at the other and a national average of ten percent.<sup>ii</sup>

Our woodlands are also more than groups of trees and should be understood as rich and complex habitats for hundreds of species of plants and animals: from microorganisms (bacteria, fungus), through insects, amphibians to birds and large mammals. Some of Bradford District's woodlands are ecologically significant and vital to the support of some species.

Bradford Council is the single largest woodland owner in the District (see map) with 111 sites (74 woods, 37 parks) totalling 857 hectares (590ha woodland, 267ha in parks) managed as woodland. In 2003 a further 703 hectares of woodland was owned by a wide range of private or charitable owners, however, planting schemes by the Council, Forest of Bradford and other land owners and community groups are believed to have increased the amount of woodland cover in the district to a figure in the range of 5 -10%.

These woodlands obviously vary in character and quality from the just planted to the ancient. Some, such as, Middleton Wood in Ilkley are designated as ancient semi-natural woodlands (ASNW) with rich and important biodiversity, others are commercial plantations - new trees on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) that were cleared of tree cover at some point. Others are newly planted woodlands in reclaimed land or greenfield sites and have yet to become fully established. Typically, many of District's woods are “remnant” woodlands surviving on land of little value for other activities such as farming, housing or industry. In some instance the woods have been sites of quarrying and mining.

### **Urban Forest**

Outside of the District's woods thousands more trees grow in parks, streets, private gardens, riverbanks, hedgerows and in private gardens. These trees can be thought of as the “connective tissue” linking woods in to a wider “urban forest”. This network supports biodiversity by providing a much larger more diverse habitat without which woods would become islands and their natural communities, cut off unable to either migrate or expand.



Native trees of the district includes, oak, ash, birch, holly, alder, rowan and hawthorn, however, many other varieties have migrated to the area or been planted to create rich and diverse treescape.

*(note: this section to include a district map showing public and private woodlands with some annotated examples.)*

**Middleton Woods:** (area) is a regionally important oak wood famed for its rich show of bluebells. The greatest threats to this type of ASNW are a combination of climate change, people pressure and invasive species.

**Judy Woods,** (area) has native oak woodland, an extensive area of 19<sup>th</sup> C. beech plantation and reclaimed mine workings. (check Judy Woods blurb)

**St Ives Country Park Estate,** (area) former home of the Ferrands, woods range from ASNW, PAWS from the 1940s and woodland planted in the last 10 years. St Ives retains park land trees.

**Rivock Edge** (area), is the single largest expanse of trees in the district and example of commercial private forestry created on what was previously blanket bog moorland.

**Northcliffe Park,** (area) has two large areas of woodland within the park itself: Old Spring Wood to the north and Northcliffe Wood to the south are both important ASNW.

### **Jargon Buster**

**ASNW:** ancient semi-natural woodland, a place that has been continuously wooded since at least 1600.

**PAWS:** plantation of ancient woodland site, a place where the wood has been cleared and replanted with a new commercial crop or has re-grown naturally. Many ASNW woodlands were cleared during WW1 and later replanted with conifers for timber.

**Biodiversity:** the range of different plants and animal species that live in an area of land. Old, undisturbed sites such as ancient woodlands will have more species than new woodlands.

## Our Communities

Bradford District is fortunate to have a broad community of interest participating in the ownership and management of its woodlands. In the private sector there are significant commercial plantations at Rivock Edge and Cottingley whilst there are many other smaller private woods. A number of woods are also either owned or managed by the voluntary sector and local communities, such as, Forest of Bradford, Woodland Trust and Heaton Wood Trust. Community participation in woodland management has been developed and supported by the Council through a network of Friends groups for 20 years.

Bradford Council recognises that local communities have a vast knowledge and experience of their woodlands and that these communities are also able to bring skills learned through life and work from many different areas to the management of local woods. Bradford Council is able to supply professional expertise and resources to the management partnerships.

### Mini Case Study

**Friends of Bierley Wood:** the FoBW were formed in late 2009 with the objective of improving Bierley Hall Wood and its three fishing ponds. The woodland suffered from litter, anti-social motorbike use, illegal grazing, unsustainable fishing and water pollution. The sheer presence of a group of local people committed to tackling these issues began to have immediate effect. Ward Councillors made funds and materials available to enable paths to be upgraded, seating installed and pond edges rebuilt. Much of the work has been undertaken by the Friends themselves. Perhaps the biggest success, however, has been the self-organisation of the angling club, which had attracted over 200 members in the first year and provided the funds to undertake restocking.

**Heaton Woods Trust:** the trust grew out of Heaton Township Association in 1978 to protect and improve Heaton Wood. With support from Bradford Council, White Rose Forest and the private sector and voluntary sectors the Trust's members have created an award winning woodland.

**Yorkshire Wildlife Trust & Scouts Association:** share responsibilities for managing Low Wood, Riddlesden, both groups hold the wood on pepper corn leases from the Council but work in partnership to increase the biodiversity value of the wood, whilst also, in the case of the Scouts, providing a place where young people can enjoy and learn about natural woodlands.

**Whafedale Naturalists:** Ben Rhydding Gravel Pits under the careful management of the WN has become a haven for a wide variety of flora and fauna, some of which is not generally found in the area. The groups works to maintain and monitor the range of micro habitats on the site.

**Friends of Northcliffe:** although the group began in opposition to a proposal to defend the Council's woodland from the development of a car park in 1990, both have gone on to work together in partnership to improve the park and its woods.

### Friends of Bradford Parks and Woodlands

Bradford Council works in partnership with 17 Friends groups with hundreds of members. Friends work to protect and improve their local park or woodland. Four groups are based around woodland sites with the others based on parks, many of which have woodlands within them, such as, Cliffe Castle and Bowling Park.

## Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector plays a key role in protecting and improving woodlands in the District. The Forest of Bradford, Bradford Community Environment Partnership (BCEP), Bradford Environmental Education (BEES), Whafedale Naturalists, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Groundworks and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) all participate in either specific projects or long term management.

## Council organisation and workforce

Bradford Council maintains a Tree and Woodland service within the Department of Environment and Sport. The service is responsible for the day to day management of the public tree and woodland estate and works alongside communities and Friends groups to maintain the District's trees and woodlands.

The Countryside and Rights of Way service and the Tree Team, both in Regeneration, provide specialist support on biodiversity issues, tree protection (Tree Preservation and High Hedges legislation) and planning issues.

## Benefits of Trees and Woodlands

Human-kind's relationship with trees and woodlands stretches back to the dawn of time and is infinitely complex and fascinating. Our towns and cities would certainly be grim and desolate places to live without street, park and garden trees breaking up the hard, "built environment". There is also now a growing understanding in society that the natural environment or "green infrastructure", including trees and woodlands is vital to the sustainability and quality of life for our communities, cities and the planet as a whole.

The story of our district during the 250 years from the start of the industrial revolution in the 1750s is one where society drew heavily on locally available natural resources and systems. Fields and woods made way for houses and factories; woodlands were exploited for materials; moorland was lost to grazing and streams, rivers and air heavily polluted. Since the Earth Summit (1992) thinking has focused on how we can manage the natural environment so that it can provide "ecosystem services" that benefit human society but without destroying them in the process.

### Some of the key benefits of trees and woodlands.

**Flood Regulation:** trees and woods in upland areas, along river courses, in flood plains and in urban areas intercept and slow the flow of rain water from the land and through the districts streams and rivers. Holding more water in watersheds and slowing run-off is important to heavily populated areas downstream and in valley bottoms.

**Temperature Regulation:** carefully planted urban trees and woods can provide shade from the sun's heat in summer and reduce the wind-chill effect in winter both reducing the demand for air conditioning and heating. The total effect of the urban forest is to reduce the "**urban heat island**" effect. Bradford University School Management Campus has been credited with an innovative design that helps reduce UHI and create a sustainable environment<sup>iii</sup>.

**Air Quality:** trees along highways actively filter out fine dust from car exhaust along with some gasses.

**Carbon Capture:** high levels of CO<sub>2</sub> are understood to be the cause of climate change. Trees and woodlands convert carbon dioxide in the air into wood, leaves and fruit. Overtime woodlands build up huge stores of carbon in standing trees, deadwood and in forest soils.

**Fuel:** trees can be grown in "short rotation" for fuel or biomass. Bradford City Hall and a growing number of buildings are heated during the winter from sustainably grown and produced woodchip or pellets. Renewable biomass is a viable alternative to fossil fuels in some places and can help to mitigate climate change.

**Timber and paper:** commercial forests managed sustainably can provide renewable sources of timber, pulp and chip for a wide range of products and industries, including, construction, furniture, paper and card manufacture etc. Esholt, St Ives (public) and, Cottingley and Rivock (private) are examples of commercial coniferous plantations. Locally grown wood has the benefit of a low carbon footprint than imported materials.

**Food and fodder:** apples grow on trees and many trees have been used as cattle fodder – holly was a traditional fodder in Pennine areas and is still reflected in place names like "hollins". These uses are not significant in the district today but community orchards are

becoming popular and more productive nut bearing trees, such as walnut, may become a feature of UK forestry.

**Biodiversity:** the entire urban forest provides a habitat to support many species. The loss of biodiversity reduces the resilience of natural systems and makes them less useful to human society. The loss of pollinating insects, such as bees, could be catastrophic to food production.

**Health and Wellbeing:** living on a tree lined street or being close to a park with trees or a woodland provides better opportunities to get outside for exercise and relaxation. Woodlands host formal and informal sporting and recreational activities everyday, including: archery, orienteering, horse riding, walking, jogging, mountain biking, bird watching or just meditating in a quiet spot.

**Education:** many schools across the district are finding that the use of outdoor classrooms in woodlands and other natural environments can engage children in learning activities in new ways. The Forest Schools network has many active practitioners teaching young people about woods, natural systems and how we can benefit from them.

**Place to invest:** an urban environment rich in good quality trees creates a more attractive place in which to invest and work. The forestry sector also creates new jobs and businesses in existing and new markets from sawn timber to biomass, charcoal to fungus or tourism and sporting activities.

## **Jargon Buster**

**Sustainability:** using natural resources today in ways that do not threaten future use.

**Natural Environment, Green Infrastructure:** soil, water, air, plants, insect, bird and animal resources.

**Eco-systems services:** key services are: “supporting” (e.g. nutrient cycling, soil formation), “provisioning” (e.g. food, freshwater, materials, fuel); “regulating” (e.g. climate and flood); “cultural” (e.g. aesthetic, spiritual, educational).

**Urban Heat Island Effect:** built environments absorb heat from the sun during the day and then release it at night. Vegetation such as trees help cool the city by creating shade and through “trans-evaporation” - movement of water from soil through to leaves.

## Changing and Challenging Times

Woodland owners, managers and communities face five strategic challenges: sustainability, climate change, natural environment, economy and quality of life. Solutions to all of these challenges to the creation of quality woodlands have to be found against a background of national deficit reduction in the short term and population growth in the longer term.

### Sustainability Challenges

The strategic challenge for woodland management has been internationally agreed as:

*'The stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems'<sup>iv</sup>.*

There are two sides to the challenge of sustainability. Firstly, how to ensure that there is at least as much useful woodland, if not more in Bradford in 50-100 years than there is today. Secondly, how to create sustainable organisations whose focus is to deliver the benefits of woodlands in the District. Woodlands that are capable of providing multiple benefits (fuel, biodiversity, timber, recreation, carbon sequestration etc) require higher levels of sustained investment and careful management.

### Climate Change Challenges

The strategic climate change challenge for the District is one of how to ensure that existing and new woods are *adapted* to the changing climate and also able to play a role in *mitigating* climate change. The Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Adaptation Study<sup>v</sup> forecast that in the period to 2050 average temperatures would increase and average rainfall will decrease resulting in drier soils; winters will be wetter with less snow and summers drier. Weather events, such as, high winds and heavy bursts of rain increase the risks of damage to trees and flash floods.

Adaptation and mitigation measures focus on building “resilience” at both the woodland and the landscape scales. Creating more woodland is generally held to be a good thing with the challenge becoming one of understanding and agreeing what is the optimal area of woodland cover that is achievable and where that woodland is best planted to create the greatest benefit in terms of carbon sequestration, fossil fuel substitution through use of local biomass and materials, flood alleviation or local climate control. There is very little land in the district that does not have competing possible uses, whether housing, farming, commercial or recreational development.

At the woodland scale creating resilience is problematic as management options are limited – unless there is scope for large scale harvesting and replanting with species thought more suitable to the changing climate, most woods are locked in to past planting or management decisions. New woodland planting offers greater opportunity to plant species more suited to the climate - for example, it may be preferable to plant oak from central and southern France rather than “native” stock or find new species for biomass.

## **Natural Environmental Challenges**

The strategic challenge for management of the natural environment is one of how to meet the future needs of society for eco-system services, particularly *provisioning* of fuel and materials or *regulating* by sequestering carbon or flood alleviation and at the same time ensuring that neither woodland biodiversity nor adjacent eco-systems are degraded or depleted.

The story of the last 250 years is one where human society has developed often at the expense of the natural environment, through habitat loss, fragmentation, conversion (agriculture, urbanisation), over exploitation of resources, pollution, introduction of invasive species and climate change. Population growth and rising expectations will drive human demands for land, energy, food and resources and will create strong financial pressure on landowners and managers to change land-use<sup>vi</sup>.

## **Quality of Life**

High quality natural environments and natural features in urban landscapes are known to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. People are healthier and have greater feelings of wellbeing if they can access greenspace where they can walk, jog, ride or just observe the natural environment. We also know that many children enjoy and benefit from outdoor play and education. The strategic challenge for managers is how to create and maintain quality natural spaces that offer opportunities for leisure, health and education for a growing number of people. This is partly about designing sustainable urban areas that incorporate natural features and also making the District's countryside and its benefits accessible to and valued by the whole community.

## **Economic Challenges**

The strategic economic challenge is twofold, firstly, how to ensure that wealth and employment creation can take place without damage to the natural environment and, secondly, how can the sustainable use of eco-system services be used to create new investment and employment opportunities.

There is a tension between economic development and protecting the greenbelt and greenspaces: the district is mostly rural and this countryside is a valuable asset. There is a strong presumption in favour of the preservation and protection of existing natural features of the landscape in the Local Development Framework and a readiness on the part of local communities to defend their greenbelt. Commercial forestry operations and increasing commercial visitor activities can also be seen to be in conflict with other uses - for example, an increasing use of biomass boilers in the District could create new green businesses and jobs along the "supply chain" from the "stump to the boiler" but would also see more activity (felling and restocking) in some woodland. Increasing visitor numbers and activities in woodlands may bring people in to the District and support employment for local for residents but may not be welcome by local communities who value "peace and quiet".

## **How Does the Woodland Strategy fit with other strategies and policies?**

All strategy is to a greater or lesser degree contingent upon a framework of other strategies and policies which change over time. The Council as a “public forester” has to make judgements and decisions in the prevailing political and resource conditions to meet objectives that may not come to fruition until many decades in to the future. The following section outlines briefly some of the policy context within which current strategic thinking and woodland management decisions are being made.

### **Government Policy**

*“The time has come to disperse power more widely in Britain today” Coalition Agreement 2010*

The Coalition Government promises radical changes to the way things are done. The emphasis generally is on creating a new settlement around the roles and responsibility of the state and those of communities and individuals. In the future the size and cost of the public sector is destined to be reduced whilst its relationship with citizens will continue to be transformed as, so called, dependency is discouraged and responsibility is encouraged. There is a degree of political consensus around this settlement with differences confined largely to the eventual size of individual areas of public provision and the speed of implementation.

### **The Future of the Public Forest Estate in England (White Paper)**

The importance of publicly owned and managed natural environments to people in England was demonstrated by the widespread and rapid response to the Government's proposals put forward in: *The Future of Public Forest Estate in England* (ref *The Future of the Public Forest Estate in England*, 2011, Defra, Forestry Commission). The Government set up the Independent Panel on Forestry to advise and make recommendations. The Panel received 42,000 submissions on forestry and in December 2012 the progress report stated: “that the Panel sees a continuing role for a national public forest estate in England”<sup>vii</sup>.

Although, the Forestry Commission does not own any woodland in Bradford District both private and local authority woodland are subject to regulation and support delivered by the Forestry Commission. The eventual approach the Government takes to the future of the public estate and the Forestry Commission will influence how local woodlands are managed.

### **A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests**

Until a new strategic direction for UK forestry is agreed, the aims set out in *England's Trees, Woods and Forests* continue to inform and guide subordinate regional and district strategies, including the operational priorities set by regional Forestry Commission Conservancies. The strategy has five broad aims:

- ✧ Optimise the environmental, economic and social benefits of trees and woods now and for future generations.
- ✧ Create resilient trees and woods that support biodiversity and mitigate climate change.



- ✧ Protect and enhance water, soil, air, biodiversity and landscape and the cultural and amenity values of trees and woodland.
- ✧ Increase the contribution that trees, woods and forests make to the quality of life.
- ✧ Develop competitive and sustainable woodland products and eco-system services where this will deliver identifiable public benefits, including the reduction of carbon emissions.

## The Natural Environment (White paper)

In June 2011 the Government produced The Natural Choice, a white paper that sets out the “long term direction of travel” for the management of the natural environment in England. The Government's stated ambition is:

*“to ensure that the benefits of high quality natural environments are available to everyone. We want this to be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited.”*

The White Paper draws on the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) 2011 and Making Space for Nature, both of which highlight the depletion and fragmentation of ecosystems and human society's dependence on them. The White Paper sets out key measures in three thematic areas:

**Protecting and Improving and our Natural Environment:** improving the quality of our natural environment, halting the decline in habitats and species, degradation of landscapes and erosion of natural capital. Achieved through joined-up action at local and national level to create a more resilient ecological network.

**Growing a Green Economy:** Protected natural areas can yield returns many times higher than the cost of their protection. There are multi-million pound opportunities available from greener goods and services, and from markets protecting nature's services. Create a green economy, in which economic growth and the health of our natural resources sustain each other, and markets, business and Government better reflect the value of nature.

**Reconnecting People and Nature:** recognises the huge benefits that we all get through contact with nature and how it helps our well-being through its positive impact on mental and physical health, improves education, encourages social activity and reduces crime. In return, voluntary activity can enrich the natural environment, as can well-informed choices by shoppers, householders and gardeners We will work to reconnect people with our fantastic natural environment and ensure fairer access.

Government action, prior to legislation, affecting local authorities has so far focused on creating **Nature Improvement Areas** (the Council supported two unsuccessful NIA bids in 2011) and setting up **Local Nature Partnerships**. The Council supports two LNRs based on the “Southern Pennines” and “West Yorkshire” through its membership and support of Pennine Prospects and West Yorkshire Biodiversity Action Partnership and White Rose Forest, respectively<sup>viii</sup>.

## **Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services<sup>ix</sup>**

The Government will meet its international and European commitments through the realisation of its Biodiversity Strategy with its mission “to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.” In terms of Forestry the strategies priority action (3.3) is to: “Bring a greater proportion of our existing woodlands into sustainable management and expand the area of woodland in England.”

## **Localism Act 2011**

Although, not directly aimed at management of the natural environment or woodlands the Localism Act will affect how these resources and services are managed and delivered. The “general power of competence” proposed for Councils (a legal capacity to do anything an individual can do that is not specifically prohibited), amending the rules on “predetermination” in areas such as planning, a “community right to challenge” and run services or buy assets of “community value” could have far reaching implications. In respect of planning, the abolition of regional strategies, the introduction of “neighbourhood development plans”, the community “right to build” and reforms to the way local plans are made, will change the context within which decisions about the natural environment and wood management are made<sup>x</sup>.

## **Regional Government and Strategy**

The coalition government has abolished regional government and strategies. However, Bradford is a founding member of the Leeds City Region Partnership and Pennine Prospects where it continues to work with other local authorities. Bradford is also a founding member of West Yorkshire Biodiversity Action Partnership and the White Rose Forest. These partnerships recognise and advocate the need to work together to preserve and enhance biodiversity and the “Green Infrastructure”, including trees and woodlands<sup>xi</sup>. Regional Spatial Strategies are embodied in the Local Development Framework.

**Climate Change Plan for Humber and Yorkshire 2009 – 2014:** sets out a vision for the region in a changing climate and identifies priority areas for action. The plan recognises that the adaptation of the green infrastructure and natural resource across the region can build resilience and help to mitigate the various impacts of climate change<sup>xii</sup>.

**The Strategic Framework for Trees, Woods and Forests in Yorkshire and the Humber Region** (July 2005). Set out priorities for action including, improving knowledge and understanding of the value of trees and woodlands; improvement of skills and business expertise in the forestry sector; increasing woodland creation; protection existing woodland; increasing access to woodlands near to where people live; increasing sustainable productivity of timber and biomass etc. and planting to alleviate flood risk<sup>xiii</sup>.

## **District Plans**

### **Big Plan 2008-2011**

The Big Plan sets out the ambitions and plans of the Bradford District Partnership<sup>xiv</sup>. The plan embodies the principles of Sustainability (living within environmental limits) and Cohesion and Inclusion (extending community participation). The Big Plan embodies international, national and regional concerns and commitments, specifically to the creation of:

A greener environment which makes best use of natural resources, and

A more sustainable environment which has a positive effect on climate change

### **Corporate Plan 2009-2012**

This sets out the Council's strategic delivery priorities and key actions. SDP 14 Contributing to a more sustainable environment plans to improve the efficient use of natural resources and increase the use of renewable energy. The District Environment Strategy, Climate Change Strategy and Carbon Management Programme detail how the strategic objectives are to be delivered<sup>xv</sup>.

### **Local Development Framework**

All Councils are required by law<sup>xvi</sup> to produce a statutory development plan for their areas. The last plan, the Replacement Unitary Development Plan (RUDP), is still in force but will gradually be replaced by a suite of new plans over the next few years which will together be known as the Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF will inform and guide the spatial dimension of development in Bradford District. The LDF Core Strategy DPD (Development Plan Document)<sup>xvii</sup> provides a Spatial Vision where: *“The District’s unique landscapes, heritage and biodiversity assets have played a vital role in making great places that encapsulates what makes Bradford so special.”* The Core Strategy goes on to set out LDF Strategic Objectives, Sub-Area and Thematic Policies that will guide planning and decision making. The Woodland Strategy in turn reflects and is aligned to the LDF.

The Landscape Character Supplementary Planning Document (2008) aims to protect and enhance the character, appearance and features which are important to the landscape and encourage an integrated approach to development that includes consideration for landscape. The Council recognises that the inherent characteristics of a landscape are vital factors in giving it local distinctiveness, and that in order to maintain this distinctiveness these characteristics must be retained and enhanced wherever possible. Trees, groups of trees and woodlands form part of the inherent characteristics of the landscape and there is a strong presumption that these features will be preserved and strengthened. However, the value given to other landscape features, such as moorland, places limits on how much land ultimately could be reforested<sup>xviii</sup>.

The LDF's recognition of the “vital role” played by natural assets in creating multiple social, economic and environmental benefits crystallises around six key actions or outcomes:

- ✧ Creation of more woodland across the district
- ✧ Equitable access to woodland
- ✧ Improving biodiversity values for woodland

## A Woodland Strategy for Bradford District 2012-2028

- ⤴ Woodland optimally adapted for resilience and mitigation of climate change
- ⤴ Woodland management and design is cognisant of sub-area distinctiveness
- ⤴ Engagement with local communities
- ⤴ Trees, woodlands, open space, greenspace are protected from development

## **DELIVERING THE STRATEGY**

The Council will achieve its aspiration of a district with high quality woodland that meets the needs of people and nature through work in three key areas: Planning, Resource Management and Participation.

### **Planning**

The key strategic planning tool up to 2028 will be the Local Development Framework. This sets out a spatial vision for the whole district where elements like woodland, play a vital role. The LDF will shape and inform strategic thinking and individual development decisions; it is also the major tool for reviewing and monitoring progress. An important element of the planning arena remains the application of constraints on development through policy and guidance that protects green assets and the use of Tree Preservation Orders.

### **Resource Management**

The Council historically has acquired land and deployed financial resources to land management. The Council will continue to be a major owner of woodland in the District and will optimise the many social, environmental and economic benefits that result from quality management of its woodland resource. The Council will continue to ensure that whilst publicly owned, its woodland resource will be managed efficiently and effectively to meet its vision and objectives.

### **Participation**

The Council recognises that better outcomes are more likely to result where citizens, communities and the Council actively participate in benefit creation. The Council will continue to work closely with communities of interest around trees and woodlands to meet the strategic vision and objectives.

The Woodland Strategy is subordinate to the strategic planning process and its focus is on key policies that shape operational resource management and participation.

## **Key Policies**

### **Woodland Creation**

The Council will strive to create more woodlands on land it owns by identifying suitable sites, partners and funding. The Council will encourage and work with other landowners to increase the amount of private woodland in the district.

### **Access**

The Council will continue to make the benefits of visiting woodland available to everyone. There are three strands to the access challenge. Firstly, ensuring that woodland resources are distributed across the district and available to people in urban and rural locations, for example, by focusing new woodland establishment in areas with low tree and woodland density. Secondly, by providing accurate information for users about where woodlands are, how to get there and what to expect. Thirdly, ensuring that barriers to access are removed, for example, by surfacing or grading some paths, swapping styles for large mobility kissing gates.

### **Landscape**

The Council will, through the Local Development Framework, continue to protect and promote trees and woodlands in the landscape to provide social, economic and environmental benefits for the District. The LDF and its Core Strategy provides an overarching vision of spatial development and mechanisms for monitoring performance, for example, hectares of woodland created.

### **Biodiversity**

The Council recognises the importance of biodiversity in creating sustainable places and will continue to ensure that woodland habitat increases and is managed in ways that raise biodiversity values. Measures will include:

- ✦ converting commercial softwood plantation to native planting
- ✦ improved woodland edge management
- ✦ invasive species control
- ✦ introduction of coppice and continual Cover Forestry
- ✦ increasing volumes of deadwood
- ✦ improved data collection and mapping

### **Climate Change**

The Council recognises the benefits of trees and woodlands in creating a more resilient and sustainable District and will continue to adapt its woodlands to mitigate climate change. Adaptation measures will include favouring species for new planting that are better suited to predicted changes in temperature and rainfall or converting open ground to woodland (rainfall interception). Climate change can be mitigated by retaining and increasing tree and woodland cover (carbon capture and storage) and by substituting local for transported resources (timber, fuel, recreation) by increasing productivity of local woodlands where appropriate.

### **Participation**

The Council will continue to encourage and develop participatory models to engage citizens, Friends, community groups and businesses in the management and development of its woodlands. Engendering participation is a recognition that better outcomes are more likely to result where the Council and community work together.

### **Wealth**

The Council will take advantage of opportunities to utilise its woodland resources to create an economically more prosperous District in two ways. Firstly, a landscape in which there are well managed trees and woodlands is a more attractive setting for investment and for people to live and work. Secondly, through the creation of working woodlands that provide employment and business opportunities in either produce (timber etc) or services (recreation).

### **Education**

The Council recognises the importance of woodlands in providing opportunities for teaching, learning and vocational training and will continue to work with schools, teaching and training organisation to open up woodlands for outdoor education.

### **Recreation**

The Council recognises the value of outdoor recreation to citizens and visitors and will ensure that public woodlands continue to provide a range of recreational opportunities for all abilities where appropriate. Meeting the recreational needs of people will continue to be balanced with other management objectives, such as, protecting biodiversity. Management for recreational use will also be aware of potential conflicts between provision of physical activities (Orienteering and Mountain Biking for example) and more contemplative activities (bird watching or seeking tranquillity).

### **Right Tree, Right Place**

The Council will endeavour to plant and maintain the “right tree in the right place”, balancing public amenity and other benefits with other obligations to “neighbours” and those affected by the Council’s tree and woodland stock on its land and in the highway. New planting should be designed for the location, existing trees should have a low risk of failure or of causing harm and legacy planting should not cause unreasonable inconvenience to others.

## References

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