

PLAN TREE



Kent County Council's Tree Establishment Strategy

2021-2031

Draft October 2021

Introduction to the ambitions of the Kent Tree Establishment Strategy

Kent County Council has an ambition that the county's tree cover will be extended by 1.5 million, establishing one new tree for every resident living in the county. By 2050, Kent will have an average tree canopy cover of 19%¹, the target recommended by the Committee on Climate Change. The delivery of these new trees, alongside the protection and restoration of existing trees, hedgerow, and woodland, will support the recovery of wildlife, provide natural climate solutions, and enrich people's lives.

This will be delivered by working in partnership with (but not limited to) district and borough and town and parish councils, the Kent Downs and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Units, the county's Countryside Management Partnerships, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, and environmental charities. We will look to bring together local communities, schools, businesses, and landowners to collaborate on tree establishment projects.

In addition to this collaborative action, Kent County Council aims to contribute directly to this county target by establishing new trees across its own estate. Although our ambitions will be greater, at a very minimum we will establish 28,600 trees per annum on land we own, manage or influence, representing a tree for every person in our own workforce. Further, Kent County Council members will have the opportunity to contribute by establishing trees within their own divisions across the four-year term; based on a target of 350 trees per division, this will account for another 28,350 trees within the county.

All trees established under our Tree Strategy will follow principles for tree establishment in Kent and the trees will be established by a combination of new stock and through managed natural regeneration. The establishment of new hedgerows will also contribute to the Strategy's target.

The Kent Tree Establishment Strategy has been prepared in reference to the Government's England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024 (May 2021) and the Woodland Trust's Emergency Tree Plan for the UK (January 2020). It also supports the ambitions of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy, the Kent Environment Strategy, the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy and the management plans of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In time the Kent Tree Establishment Strategy will also be linked to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, required under the Environment Bill.

¹ In line with the national and Woodland Trust Emergency Plan target of 19%; the target recommended by the Committee on Climate Change if the UK is to be carbon neutral by 2050.

The importance of trees to Kent

A recent tree canopy assessment (July 2020²) calculated the county had 64,751 ha of tree cover, with an average tree canopy cover of 17% and an urban tree cover average also at 17% (above the England average of 16%). In terms of distribution across the county, west Kent districts have a far greater canopy cover (28-30%) than those in east Kent (4-9%).

Kent has 11% of England's ancient semi-natural woodland, with more ancient woodland than any other county in the UK; and in the south east, the county has 22.5% of the region's ancient woodland resource. Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland is the county's largest semi-natural habitat, covering 44,490ha and just over 11% of Kent³.

Our two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are heavily wooded – the High Weald has the most wooded landscape in the country with 28% woodland cover; and the Kent Downs has 23% and the majority of this is irreplaceable ancient woodland (70%).

Our history of fruit production has also left us with traditional orchards found in two main areas, the North Kent Fruit Belt (between Rochester and Faversham) and the Mid Kent Fruit Belt (in the central areas of the High and Low Weald and the Greensand). Many of these have been lost in the past half century and traditional orchards now only account for 0.4% of Kent's habitats; but this seemingly small resource is nationally important, comprising around 10% of the traditional orchard area in England⁴.

The great extent of Kent's woodland and tree cover tells a story of how we have used trees and the value of them to us. Today we not only value trees for the **food**, timber and fuel they provide but also for their recreation, wildlife, ecosystem services and carbon capture and storage benefits.

The value of trees⁵⁶

- Trees and woodlands are valuable habitats to our county's wildlife. Oak trees support more life than any other UK native tree – they are a haven for a colossal 2,300 wildlife species, providing vital spaces to eat, shelter and breed⁷.
- Trees, especially large ones, can store significant amounts of carbon. Kent and Medway's forests store 367,374 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year⁸.
- Trees are very effective at mitigating the effects of air pollution and improving air quality by using their leaves and bark to primarily intercept airborne particulate matter but also by absorbing other pollutants from the air, such as sulphur dioxide, nitric acid, nitric oxide, and ammonia from the air.

² https://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0012/111360/Canopy-cover-report.pdf

³ Kent Habitat Survey, 2012

⁴ Kent Habitat Survey, 2012

⁵ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/1702/benefits-of-trees-outside-woods.pdf>

⁶ <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/INPRACTICE73web.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/oak-tree-wildlife/>

⁸ Kent and Medway Emissions Analysis and Pathways to Net Zero report (December 2020)

- Trees provide shade, reducing summer air temperatures and the urban heat island effect.
- Trees provide hydrological benefits in the form of reduced runoff, flood alleviation and water quality enhancement. Conifers intercept between 25-45% of annual rainfall while broadleaves intercept between 10-25%⁹.
- Trees improve soil and reduce soil erosion – decaying leaves and bark add a protective layer to the earth, which protects against evaporation from heat and retains water, keeping soil healthy.
- In terms of cultural services, trees are a fundamental part of the cultural landscape of Kent, providing character and local distinctiveness to many areas.
- Within urban areas, people show a generally favourable attitude towards street trees, with the most highly rated benefit being visual attractiveness. In addition, evidence suggests that in urban areas the presence of trees can be used to deter crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 84% of the UK public agree that more trees should be planted in response to climate change¹⁰.
- 95% of UK public value woodlands for their wildlife value¹¹.
- There is strong and growing evidence linking exposure to trees with enhancements in both physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Broadleaved trees have also been shown to have a positive impact on property values ranging from 5-18%, with larger trees having a greater proportional value¹².
- Commercial and urban areas with good tree cover tend to attract higher levels of inward investment¹³
- Trees provide us with timber, fuel, fodder, fruit, nuts, berries, and biofuels.

⁹ Calder, I.R., Reid, I., Nisbet, T. and Green, J. C. (2003) Impact of lowland forests in England on water resources. *Water Resources Research*, 39: 1319 – 1328

¹⁰ Public opinion of forestry – climate change, Forest Research, <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2018/uk-forests-and-climate-change/public-opinion-of-forestry-climate-change/>

¹¹ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/public-opinion-of-forestry/>

¹² Department for Communities and Local Government (2008) *Trees in Towns II. A new survey of urban trees in England and their condition and management.*

¹³ Department of Environment (1997) *Managing Urban Spaces in Town Centres – Good Practice Guide.*

Realising the value of trees in Kent – our objectives for tree establishment

Establishing the right trees in the right places will help deliver benefits for Kent's wildlife, people, and economy. Through extending tree cover in Kent and delivering this Strategy, we aim to deliver the following objectives.

Contribute to Kent County Council's, and the county's, net zero targets

The UK has a net zero target of 2050. Kent County Council is working towards carbon neutrality for its own estate and services by 2030. We are also committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the whole county to net zero by 2050. In order to meet these ambitious but necessary targets to address climate change, not only must we reduce our emissions but we need to remove carbon from the atmosphere.

A new native woodland can capture 300-400 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per hectare by year 50; by 100 years this increases to 400-600 per hectare¹⁴ (typical densities range from 1000 to 2500 trees per hectare). Acting now to increase our tree stock across the county will make a significant contribution towards our targets for 2030 and 2050.

Reduce and reverse the trend of decline in nature and loss of trees

Existing native woodlands are isolated and in poor ecological condition. These factors coupled with the widespread loss of 'trees outside woods' from the landscape have contributed to a troubling decline in our biodiversity – 53% of UK woodland species are in decline¹⁵.

Native broadleaved woodlands, managed to a semi-natural condition, can deliver exceptional biodiversity value because of the mosaic of habitats that can exist within. In woodlands with more natural systems, trees seed, grow and die at different times, creating a varied structure of tree maturity and species diversity as more light reaches below the canopy.

Through improved and/or more appropriate management, natural regeneration, an increase in our native woodlands and improved connectivity between our woodlands, we can begin to address the decline in wildlife that depend on these habitats.

Tackle the multiple threats to our trees

Woods and trees are subject to a number of overlapping threats including direct loss, climate impacts, imported diseases, invasive plants, mammal browsing and air pollutants. These threats diminish the benefits of woods and trees for people and for wildlife.

By better management and consideration of our tree stock, and care and attention paid to the establishment of new stock, we can develop a tree resource that has

¹⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/689431/A5_Leaflet_WC_Carbon_Code_V4_Web.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf>

increased resilience to disease, climate change and natural hazards and ensures woodlands are better connected with each other and other priority habitats.

Deliver nature-based solutions to some of the county's challenges

In addition to carbon sequestration, trees provide a wealth of services including:

- Improved soil quality and integrity - woodlands and well-established hedgerows produce high quality soil through increased organic content falling to the woodland floor. They also act as barriers, slowing water flow and preventing soil erosion.
- Improved air quality - trees and vegetation capture pollutants such as sulphur dioxide, nitric acid, nitric oxide, and ammonia, cleaning the air as they do so. Broadleaved trees and hedges take up more pollution through their larger leaves and create turbulent air movement which contributes to increased pollutant uptake and pollutant dissipation.
- Reduction in surface water flooding - woodlands play a vital role in offsetting surface water flooding through water intake from the ground, preventing water saturation. Trees also intercept rainwater in their canopies which reduces the amount of water reaching the ground. Woodlands and hedgerows also slow the rate of surface water flow through their soils.
- Urban cooling - through increasing the tree canopy throughout urban areas, transpiration increases which helps to reduce air temperature and increase humidity, contributing to a cooling effect.

Careful planning and strategically placed trees can be used to deliver multiple benefits and through following the tree establishment principles we can ensure we realise the greatest value of our tree stock within the county.

Provide enhanced and improved recreation and amenity

Woodland, and trees outside woodlands, provide many societal benefits including:

- Opportunities for recreation and education.
- Enhanced and quality outdoor experiences, include a connection with nature.
- Improvements to local amenity and distinctiveness.
- A contribution to people's health and wellbeing.

By increasing tree cover in the county and considering where this is most needed and/or where it would offer the greatest societal benefits, we can boost these benefits across Kent.

Address the decline in trees outside woodland and decline in urban trees

Trees outside of woodlands are among the most valuable to society; people place great value on trees and green spaces in their local communities. 19% of the UK's trees are outside woodland¹⁶, with non-woodland tree cover amounting to 11% of land in urban areas and 3% in rural¹⁷.

Urban trees have a huge value:

¹⁶ [State of the UK's Woods and Trees - Woodland Trust](#)

¹⁷ [Tree cover outside woodlands in Great Britain - Statistical Report \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](#)

- Benefit mental and physical health
- Reduce surface water flooding
- Provide habitats and connectivity for wildlife
- Lower noise pollution and combat air pollution
- Increase property values
- Reduce temperatures in towns and cities

The strategy will look to tackle urban areas lacking in tree cover and reduce the loss of these important trees. We will work with our district and borough colleagues to ensure that trees are well provided for within Local Plans and are properly considered, with quality designed landscaping, within new development.

Realise the economic benefits

Trees and woodlands have a number of business uses, including timber and wood products, fruit, and fungi, as well as commercial leisure hire. Further to these, a developing market is using established tree stock, and/or land for tree establishment, to offer carbon offset for unavoidable emissions. Growing this market in Kent could deliver some of the investment we need to manage, expand, and connect our tree stock and woodlands.

Further, market development relating to the provision of Plant Healthy tree stock could enable additional jobs and revenue in the county.

Increase our knowledge and provide better protection

In order to ensure our trees, have the protection they need and to ensure efforts of establishment are targeted to where restoration is required or gaps exist, we need to improve our understanding of trees in the county and the benefits (value) they provide.

Principles for tree establishment in Kent

In delivering our Kent Tree Establishment Strategy, the following principles for tree establishment will be followed.

1. Better management and protection of existing stock

The first step is to protect and restore the county's existing trees and native woodland. This includes ensuring that any loss of ancient woodland, aged and/or veteran trees will be wholly exceptional. For our broader woodland and trees stock, where tree loss is unavoidable these are replaced at a greater ratio to that lost. For any non-woodland tree removed, there should be the aim, where feasible, of a replacement tree (or more than one) in the new location or as close to the original location as possible and be the same type of planting¹⁸.

Our existing stock should also be secure from pests and disease; investment is required to support Kent's (and the South East's) tree nurseries to enable a rapid expansion of locally grown native trees to reduce disease risk of importing trees. Biosecurity of tree establishment should also be improved (see principle below). Further to this, we need to better understand and manage impacts from natural threats (such as deer, squirrels, and climate change) on tree stock.

Another way to ensure biosecurity is to ensure natural regeneration is a key part of the county's tree establishment plans, whereby through appropriate management we allow nature to take its course and provide additional tree cover.

2. The right tree in the right place

Natural regeneration will need to be complemented by considered and well-planned establishment of new tree stock. Where we look to establish new trees, this must adhere to the following principles to ensure appropriate, successful, and sustainable tree establishment across the county:

- The right tree
- In the right place
- For the right reason
- With the right management

The right tree in the right place principle

Applying the four elements of the right tree in the right place principle, will result in constraints on how and where we deliver our establishment plan. The specifics of these constraints will be defined as part of the Strategy's implementation and will consider (but not be limited to):

- native and local provenance species
- species that deliver a specific service or function
- landscape biodiversity (e.g. grassland and woodland) and character, previous

¹⁸ Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Plan for the UK

landscape patterns and historical context

- location
- archaeological implications
- soil functions
- habitat types that should be protected from tree/woodland establishment
- land uses
- woodland connectivity
- water recharge and availability
- local issues such as poor air quality or flood risks
- unintended consequences
- the purposes of the tree within that location
- the need for management to have minimal environmental impact (for instance no plastic use for tree guards and shield and water demand).

3. Deliver multiple benefits

Investment of public money must demonstrate value and opportunities to deliver multiple benefits from tree establishment must be realised. This includes:

- Delivery of nature-based solutions, focussing tree establishment in areas of need such as those with high levels of pollution, flood risk and urban heat.
- Provision of amenity benefits, focussing establishment in areas of need such as those with low tree cover, low levels of quality green space, higher levels of deprivation and poor 'health and wellbeing' outcomes.
- Restore and improve biodiversity, addressing fragmentation through better connecting to other woodland and other priority habitat and establishing appropriate management to enable wildlife restoration.
- Delivery of economic benefits, such as the expansion of existing, and development of new markets for wood products and services; and the provision of new job opportunities.

4. Ensure biosecurity of new tree stock through application of strict standards

Biosecurity should be ensured by utilising UK grown stock of a known provenance, seeking to maximise genetic diversity of genus and species. All stock used should be from nurseries with a clear Plant Health Management Standards and have the Plant Healthy accreditation or equivalent.

Kent County Council action to date

Since stating its ambitions in 2019 for 1.5 million new trees to be established in the county, Kent County Council has delivered the following:

- 36,895 trees planted by the Old Chalk New Downs project, with KCC and Heritage Lottery Funding (2019-21/22). All trees are a native species mix, with local stock sourced from Kent nurseries and the majority have been planted with biodegradable cardboard tree guards rather than plastic.
- 16,000 trees and hedges planted by the county's Countryside Management Partnerships¹⁹ (2019).
- 13,615 trees planted by the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership project, with KCC and Heritage Lottery Funding (2020-21).
- Average of 900 street trees planted per annum by Kent Highways (2019-21).
- £275,129 of funding from the Local Authority Treescape Fund, delivering 250 standard trees and 41,000 whips in Ashford and Swale.
- £500,000 from the Shared Outcomes Fund, to deliver 3,588 trees and 6,408m² of natural regeneration through the Trees Outside Woodland project (2020-23).
- Appointment of a dedicated officer to oversee the delivery of the Kent Tree Establishment Strategy.

The Kent Tree Establishment Strategy builds on this action and provides a more robust framework for tree establishment in Kent and the collaborative action needed to deliver on the 1.5 million trees ambition.

¹⁹ [Home - Kent Countryside Partnerships](#)

Kent Tree Establishment Strategy – Kent County Council Action Plan

In order to deliver on the Kent Tree Establishment Strategy, the following actions will be delivered.

1. Deliver against the tree establishment target

- Develop a ten-year strategic tree planting plan²⁰, including a tree planting project pipeline. In association develop a three-year delivery plan, published to give visibility of schemes, with an investment plan to underpin this work.
- Establish a detailed definition of the “right tree in the right place”, identifying the specific constraints of tree, location, purpose, and management.
- Working with district councils and other partners, respond to central government calls for bids for tree planting, and other government support that will help implement the Kent Tree Establishment Strategy, maximising funding investment for the county.
- Set annual expansion targets, with targets focussing on both quality and quantity. By measuring quality, we will ensure the expansion of trees in Kent also delivers recovery of nature, enriches people’s lives, sequesters, and stores carbon and delivers other nature-based solution benefits.
- With partners, identify creation, restoration and protection opportunities for woods and trees on a broader county-wide scale.
- Work with individual farmers, land owners and managers to reinstate and expand the county’s hedgerow network, to benefit landscape and wildlife.
- Work with parish and town councils and other urban community groups to increase trees in urban areas.
- Develop an associated tree establishment monitoring and reporting approach against the county target.

2. Exemplar provision for trees on our own estate

- Identify creation, restoration and protection opportunities for woods and trees on the KCC estate.
- Review whether further tree establishment on our Highways is a feasible route to help increase the volume of trees outside woodlands and in our urban areas.
- Ensure our wooded estate provides exemplary public value by integrating climate action with other nature-based solutions, high quality access and wildlife recovery.

²⁰ The Strategy’s establishment targets and timeframe may need to be revised once the tree planting plan and opportunity mapping work is completed; only then will we understand if the 1.5 million is feasible/deliverable within the timeframe and in respect of available land.

- Review, and revise, if necessary, our tree establishment and replacement policies across the KCC estate and for land we manage/influence. Ensure the best standards are delivered through a renewed tree establishment (incl. protection and maintenance) and replacement policy.

3. Improve protection to trees in Kent

- Use our planning functions to ensure protection and regulated management of irreplaceable veteran trees and ancient woodland on or adjacent to development sites, with prevention of further loss or damage controlled through conditions and legal agreements as appropriate. There shall be a general presumption in favour of retention and enhancement of existing tree, woodland and hedgerow cover on planning application sites determined by the planning authority.
- Work with district and borough colleagues to ensure that trees are well provided for within Local Plans and are properly considered, with quality designed landscaping underpinned by the principles supporting safe and secure layouts, within new development. Consider the development of guidance for development to support this (e.g., Kent Design Guidance or Supplementary Planning Document).
- Develop sustainable and bio-secure supply-chains for local-provenance trees, seed, tree-guards, fencing and other materials, ensuring that Kent's nurseries and suppliers realise the opportunities presented by the development of this market.

4. Improve our understanding of Kent's trees

- Ensure we have a clear picture of KCC's, and in turn Kent's, tree stock, both woodlands and trees outside woodland, with areas lacking in tree cover identified.
- Ensure our ancient woodland inventory is up to date and undertake a veteran tree inventory.
- Assess the impact natural threats (for example deer, squirrels, climate change) on tree establishment across Kent to understand how such risks may impact the county's target and to ensure appropriate management/protection is put in place.

5. Develop Kent carbon offset market for unavoidable emissions

- Support work in the county to grow the nature-based carbon offset market for unavoidable emissions and identify opportunities on our estate to offset carbon and in turn deliver investment into our trees and the benefits they provide.

Partners and funding

Collaboration and partnership working will be key to delivering on the ambition of 1.5 million trees established in Kent. It will be vital that work across the county is linked up and tree establishment is not delivered in a disparate manner – this will ensure that opportunities to connect new woodlands and trees are realised and that we have a network of tree cover in the county that supports the recovery of wildlife, provides natural climate solutions, and enriches people’s lives.

Partners will include (but are not limited to):

- District and Borough councils
- Town and Parish councils
- Woodland Trust
- Forestry Commission
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit
- High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit
- Kent’s Countryside Management Partnerships
- Kent Wildlife Trust
- RSPB
- Country Land and Business Association
- National Farmers Union
- Community and volunteer groups, such as The Kent Men of the Trees

The Strategy’s three-year delivery plan will not only set out the tree establishment for that period but will also identify specific funding sources for the work. There are currently a number of tree grants financing options available which may be applicable and include (but are not limited to)²¹:

- Woodland Creation Planning Grant
- HS2 Woodland Fund
- Urban Tree Challenge Fund
- Local Authority Treescapes Fund
- Woodland Carbon Fund
- Woodland Carbon Code
- Woodland Carbon Guarantee
- Woodland Management Planning (part of Countryside Stewardship)
- Woodland Creation and Maintenance (part of Countryside Stewardship)
- Woodland Tree Health (part of Countryside Stewardship)
- Woodland Improvement (part of Countryside Stewardship)
- The Tree Council Community Hedge Fund
- Highways England Environment and Wellbeing Designated Fund Plan
- National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative
- NGO and charity tree funding schemes

²¹ Forestry Commission advice

- Corporate investment
- High net wealth individual investment interests
- Local nature-based carbon offset markets
- (in time) Environmental Land Management scheme
- (in time) Biodiversity Net Gain