

# PLAN TREE



## **Kent County Council's Tree Establishment Strategy**

**2022-2032**

**September 2022**

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# Foreword

*To be written*

## Executive summary

Kent Plan Tree sets an ambition for Kent to **extend tree cover by 1.5 million new trees** and increase the county's **average canopy cover to 19%**. Furthermore, our existing woodland and trees health will be restored and afforded greater protection from loss.

Tree establishment in the county will be underpinned by four principles –

The first step is to protect and restore the county's existing trees and native woodland and therefore the founding principle is one of **better management and protection of existing stock**. This not only aims to avoid loss but ensure our existing stock is secure from pests and disease.

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 principle of **the right tree, in the right place, for the right reason, with the right management and right monitoring** to ensure appropriate, successful and sustainable tree establishment across the county that is secured for the long-term.

Investment of public money needs to demonstrate value and therefore the design of any tree establishment will look to **deliver multiple benefits**, including nature based solutions; amenity benefits; nature recovery; and economic benefits.

And finally, we must **ensure the biosecurity of new tree stock through application of strict standards** on the trees we plant and the places we source stock from.

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
- Reduce and reverse the trend of decline in nature and loss of trees
- Tackle the multiple threats to our trees
- Deliver nature-based solutions to some of the county's challenges
- Provide enhanced and improved recreation and amenity
- Address the decline in trees outside woodland and decline in urban trees
- Realise the economic benefits
- Increase our knowledge and provide better protection

Since stating the ambition in 2019 for 1.5 million new trees to be established in the county, Kent County Council has delivered over 111,600 new trees and 6,032m<sup>2</sup> of natural regeneration (until March 2022); and more planting is scheduled over the coming years. This Strategy looks to build on this action and provide a more robust framework for tree establishment in Kent and the collaborative action needed to deliver on the ambitious tree targets for the county.

The Strategy sets out some specific actions that Kent County Council will take to progress delivery of the ambitions and objectives of Plan Tree. These actions focus on:

1. Delivering against the tree establishment target.
2. Exemplar provision for trees on our own estate.
3. Improving protection to trees in Kent.
4. Improving our understanding of Kent's trees.
5. Developing the Kent carbon offset market for unavoidable emissions.

The actual delivery of these actions will be laid out in a more detailed implementation plan that will sit alongside the Strategy. In addition to detailing a delivery schedule for this action plan, the implementation plan will also more clearly define:

- Specific targets for extending canopy in rural, agroforestry and urban settings.
- Targets for delivery through assisted natural regeneration.
- Targets for improving the ecological condition of native and ancient woodland and associated priority species.
- A tree establishment plan, associated resources and a comprehensive monitoring and reporting process.

Plan Tree 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.

# 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%<sup>1</sup>, the target recommended by the Committee on Climate Change.

In addition to increasing the extent of trees in the county, the ecological condition of the county's native woodland and ancient and veteran trees will be restored. And our existing trees will be afforded better recognition for the vital role they play and, consequently, better protection from loss, so that there is a genuine and significant gain of tree stock within Kent.

The delivery of new trees, via a mixture of planting and assisted natural regeneration, coupled with 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.

These ambitions 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 the 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 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, Kent's Plan Bee, 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

county's Local Nature Recovery Strategy<sup>2</sup>, recognising the critical role of trees and woodland in the response to the nature and climate emergency by integrating them into broader strategic, landscape-scale action for nature's recovery.

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<sup>2</sup> Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a requirement of the Environment Act 2021. Following the required secondary legislation (anticipated autumn 2022), Kent County Council will be appointed Responsible Authority for the LNRS for Kent and Medway, at which point work on this Strategy will commence.

## The importance of trees to Kent

A recent tree canopy assessment (July 2020<sup>3</sup>) calculated the county had 64,751ha 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 Kent<sup>4</sup>.

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 woodlands are important to our natural heritage and home to a vast array of wildlife, including some nationally threatened woodland species<sup>5</sup>. Kent is one of the last strongholds of Nightingale in the UK and is also important for the declining and scarce Hawfinch. The county is also one of a small handful of locations where the woodland butterfly, Heath Fritillary, is found and the increasingly rare and now threatened Duke of Burgundy. Our woodlands are also important for some rare moths, including the Common Fan Foot moth and the Heart moth, with Kent being one of only four sites where this species is found. And the Blean Woods hosts Britain's only known population of the money spider, *Walckenaeria mitrata*. The county's woodlands are also important for mammals – along with the other southern counties, Kent is a stronghold for the Hazel Dormouse. And our ancient broadleaved woodlands are hugely important for bats, with Kent's woodlands being home to one of the UK's rarest mammals, the Bechstein's bat.

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 England<sup>6</sup>.

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.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/111360/Canopy-cover-report.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/111360/Canopy-cover-report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Kent Habitat Survey, 2012

<sup>5</sup> State of Nature in Kent, 2021 <https://kentnature.org.uk/state-of-nature/>

<sup>6</sup> Kent Habitat Survey, 2012



Kent's trees are not only at risk from land use change and development but also pests and diseases. Our landscape still features the scars of Dutch elm disease and is now impacted again by Ash dieback and other pests and diseases such as the Oriental chestnut gall wasp and sweet chestnut blight. The county is particularly vulnerable given its proximity to the continent, meaning Kent's tree population is often impacted by 'new' pests and diseases sooner than other parts of the country.

### **The value of trees<sup>78</sup>**

- 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 breed<sup>9</sup>.
- Trees, especially large ones, can store significant amounts of carbon. Kent and Medway's forests store 367,374 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year<sup>10</sup>.
- 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.
- 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%<sup>11</sup>.
- 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 change<sup>12</sup>.
- 95% of UK public value woodlands for their wildlife value<sup>13</sup>.
- 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 value<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/1702/benefits-of-trees-outside-woods.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/INPRACTICE73web.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/oak-tree-wildlife/>

<sup>10</sup> Kent and Medway Emissions Analysis and Pathways to Net Zero report (December 2020)

<sup>11</sup> 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

<sup>12</sup> 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/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/public-opinion-of-forestry/>

- Commercial and urban areas with good tree cover tend to attract higher levels of inward investment<sup>15</sup>
- Trees provide us with timber, fuel, fodder, fruit, nuts, berries, and biofuels.

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<sup>14</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2008) Trees in Towns II. A new survey of urban trees in England and their condition and management.

<sup>15</sup> 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 hectare<sup>16</sup> (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 decline<sup>17</sup>. Further, woodland birds have declined by 29% since 1970; woodland butterflies by 40% since 1990; and woodland plants by 18% since 2015<sup>18</sup>.

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, assisted natural regeneration, restoration of our traditional orchards, an increase in our native woodlands and improved connectivity between our wooded landscapes, we can begin to address the decline in wildlife that depend on these habitats. This work will link in with, and help deliver, other nature recovery work in the county including the forthcoming Kent Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Kent's Plan Bee (the county council's pollinator action plan) and the Kent Biodiversity Strategy.

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<sup>16</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/689431/A5\\_Leaflet\\_WC\\_Carbon\\_Code\\_V4\\_Web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/689431/A5_Leaflet_WC_Carbon_Code_V4_Web.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Putting woods and trees at the heart of nature recovery, Woodland Trust, 2022

### **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 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 woodland<sup>19</sup>, with non-woodland tree cover amounting to 11% of land in urban areas and 3% in rural<sup>20</sup>.

Urban trees have a huge value:

- Benefit mental and physical health
- Opportunities to engage with nature
- 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.

In addition, trees and woodland's role in the county's culture, landscape and beauty all have an economic benefit in terms of it making Kent an attractive place to live, work and visit.

## **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.

Kent's residents, business and landowners also need to be supported to assist in the tree establishment agenda with access to good information, professional and advice and accessible guidance.

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<sup>19</sup> [State of the UK's Woods and Trees - Woodland Trust](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Tree cover outside woodlands in Great Britain - Statistical Report \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](#)

# 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. And for our broader woodland and trees stock, establishing strong policies across the county that protect these from loss. Where tree loss is unavoidable, these are replaced at a greater ratio to that lost; and 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 planting<sup>21</sup>.

We also need to ensure that environmental policy, strategy and action enables the restoration of our native woodland's ecological condition and improves the connectivity of the wooded landscape, so that woodland biodiversity is recovered and resilient.

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
- And with the right monitoring

### **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

<sup>21</sup> Woodland Trust Emergency Tree Plan for the UK

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 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).

The right management will ensure that any new tree or woodland receives what it needs to reach maturity; and then continues to be maintained, so that it is productive and fully functioning in terms of the many services it may provide. Where relevant, this management may need to be through mechanisms such as conservation covenants so that the long-term security of our gained trees is ensured.

The right management also includes, ideally, allowing a tree to run its full life cycle; that being not just to maturity, but from seed to 'snag' (decaying tree). Forests absorb carbon from the atmosphere through photosynthesis and store the carbon in living biomass, dead wood, litter, and soil. Some soils can contain as much carbon as the trees; and some soil types can contain considerably more. Both standing and fallen dead wood is important for the health of our woodland. Decomposition is a natural process involving the slow release of nitrogen and carbon storage with many positive impacts including nutrient cycling, natural regeneration and the formation of micro-habitats. As a tree starts to decompose its usefulness to wildlife is about to peak, with deadwood dependant organisms accounting for some 40% of all the wildlife species in woodland. Whilst Plan Tree is looking at how tree establishment can support our net zero targets, it is also about realising the other services trees can provide and therefore the intended life cycle within the management must be considered.

All tree establishment work, whether through assisted natural regeneration or planting, must be accompanied by appropriate monitoring and reporting. We not only need to know what we're gaining but where and to what effect – and the benefits that are being derived.

### **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 and engagement, 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 that have adopted the Plant Health Management Standard (PHMS) with Plant Healthy accreditation or equivalent.



## Challenges to tree establishment

Our ambitions for tree establishment must be set in the context of the challenges that face extending tree cover in the county.

One of the greatest challenges is land availability. To deliver the ambitions of this Strategy, large scale woodland creation will be required however land in public ownership appropriate for this is limited and therefore we will need to look to private landowners to assist. There are many other competing demands for this available land – food security, development and infrastructure to name a few. Further, landowners must be willing to allow that land to be excluded from other uses, as any trees established must be secured for the long-term. It is therefore important that where landowners are willing to provide land for tree establishment, they are assured that there will be a financial return on this and there are currently many unknowns in respect of environmental payments.

The unknowns in relation to supply of land for tree establishment creates a challenge in respect of delivering on 1.5 million new trees and 19% canopy. It is only once opportunity mapping is completed, will we know whether these ambitions are actually feasible.

Whilst one of the benefits of tree planting is providing mitigation for climate change and its impact, trees themselves are susceptible to the effects of a changing climate. Changing weather patterns and climate, including drier conditions, may affect our native species and extreme weather events, such as storms and wildfire, may result in the direct loss of trees. A changing climate can also result in tree pests and diseases and our location to the continent increases these risks. Other natural threats, such as increasing deer and squirrel populations, can make the establishment of new trees difficult without costly protective measures.

A further challenge is security of supply and whether the UK's nurseries are able to produce new plants in the quantities required, as the whole of the country steps up efforts to increase tree coverage. And further, whether in Kent we can source sufficient supply given the biosecure standards we want to work to.

And with the current drive to plant more trees, there is a deficit on the sector in respect of the infrastructure and associated expertise and workforce needed to deliver. Not just forestry skills (there has been a year-on-year decline in forestry courses at UK institutions) but also across the board we require more researchers, silviculturists, ecologists, planting, maintenance and harvesting contractors. It will also require a huge retraining of land managers who lack knowledge and understanding of woodland management.

Many of these challenges need to be addressed at the national level but within our county work we need to be mindful of these and engage with, and support, efforts to solve them.

## Kent County Council action to date

Since stating the ambitions in 2019 for 1.5 million new trees to be established in the county, Kent County Council has enabled or been directly responsible for the delivery of 111,921 trees and 6,032m<sup>2</sup> of natural regeneration up to the end of the 2021/22 planting season:

- 39,265 trees planted by the KCC hosted Old Chalk New Downs project, with KCC and Heritage Lottery Funding. 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.
- 16,850 trees and hedges planted by the county's Countryside Management Partnerships<sup>22</sup>.
- 13,615 trees planted by the Kent Downs AONB led Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme with KCC, EU and National Lottery Heritage Funding.
- 4,100 trees as part of a natural flood management project in a landscape partnership scheme with the Kent Downs AONB unit. Funded by DEFRA's Farming in Protected Landscapes grant and The National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 2,027 trees planted by KCC's arboriculture team, including trees as part of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund round 1 and the Queens Green Canopy.
- 3,810 trees and 6,032m<sup>2</sup> of natural regeneration for the Trees Outside Woodland Project, enabled with £500,000 funding from the Shared Outcomes Fund.
- 250 saplings planted at Shaw Grange closed landfill site, with hedgerow to be established later in 2022.
- 32,000 trees in Ashford, delivered by the Borough Council with funding from the Local Authority Treescape Fund round 1.
- Initial planting of 4 trees for Jubilee Wood at Sandwich School.
- Appointment of a dedicated officer to oversee the delivery of the Kent Tree Establishment Strategy.

Over the next three years, the following is already planned, accounting for a further 76,493 new trees, and more tree establishment projects are still to be developed:

- 1,700 trees for remainder of planting for Sandwich School Jubilee Wood.
- 2,297 trees (mixed species) to be planted at the Allington Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- 250 trees in Swale, delivered by the Borough Council with funding from the Local Authority Treescape Fund round 1.
- 14,664 trees at a variety of school and NHS sites, delivered with funding from the Local Authority Treescape Fund round 2.
- 632 trees by KCC's arboriculture team, with funding from the Urban Tree Challenge Fund round 2.
- 28,350 via the Kent County Council Members Tree Schemes
- 28,600 tree establishment on Kent County Council owned land.

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<sup>22</sup> [Home - Kent Countryside Partnerships](#)

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.

# Kent Tree Establishment Strategy – Kent County Council Action Plan

In order to deliver on the Kent Tree Establishment Strategy, Kent County Council will take forward a number of actions over the Strategy period. The actual delivery of these actions will be laid out in a more detailed implementation plan that will sit alongside the Strategy. In addition to detailing a delivery schedule for this action plan, the implementation plan will also more clearly define:

- Specific targets for extending canopy in rural, agroforestry and urban settings.
- Targets for delivery through assisted natural regeneration.
- Targets for improving the ecological condition of native and ancient woodland and associated priority species.
- A tree establishment plan, associated resources and a comprehensive monitoring and reporting process.

## 1. Deliver against the tree establishment target

- Develop a ten-year strategic Kent County Council tree planting plan, including a tree planting project pipeline. In association develop a three-year delivery plan, published to give visibility of schemes, with a funding/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.
- Establish priorities for ecological condition recovery, responses to tree disease and woodland connectivity; and develop targeted action for important and/or threatened woodland species. Ensure development of the Kent Local Nature Recovery Strategy enables the delivery of these, alongside specific tree establishment to be delivered by Plan Tree.
- Establish maintenance, management and monitoring plans for newly established trees and develop mechanisms that ensure the long-term security of this new tree cover, such as conservation covenants.
- Work with partners across the county to establish a resourced Kent Plan Tree Partnership, with the capacity and capability to support joined-up action in the delivery of tree establishment in the county.
- 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, extension, connection, restoration and protection opportunities for woods and trees on a broader county-wide scale and develop a county-wide opportunity map and tree establishment plan<sup>23</sup>.
- Develop a transparent and accessible tree establishment monitoring and reporting approach against the county target.
- Work with individual farmers, landowners and managers to reinstate and expand the county's hedgerow network and extend tree cover, to benefit landscape and wildlife.
- Work with parish and town councils and other urban community groups to increase trees in urban areas.

## **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.
- Review, and revise if necessary and/or feasible, 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, and offered appropriate protection by, Local Plans, so that loss as a result of development is minimised and that the inclusion of new trees is properly

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<sup>23</sup> 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.

considered, with quality designed landscaping in new development. Consider the provision of additional planning guidance for development to support this.

- 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 of 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.
- Promote the importance of trees to landowners, businesses and the local community so that everyone understands the value of trees and woodlands, the important services they provide and the role they can play in helping to increase tree cover in Kent.
- Establish a hub of information that provides support to partners, landowners, businesses and the local community to identify, develop and deliver creation, restoration and protection opportunities.

#### **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 ambitions of the Plan Tree Strategy. 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.

Partnership working will be facilitated by establishing a resourced Kent Plan Tree Partnership, with the capacity and capability to support joined-up action in the delivery of tree establishment in the county.

Partners will include (but are not limited to):

- District and Borough councils
- Town and Parish councils
- 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
- Woodland Trust
- National TrustRSPB
- Country Land and Business Association
- National Farmers Union
- Wood and forestry businesses
- Kent Tree Warden Network
- Kent Association of Local Councils
- Public sector landowners e.g. NHS
- Rewilding Britain
- Community and volunteer groups, such as The Kent Men of the Trees
- Developers
- Education settings

Kent’s residents and businesses will also have an important role in helping to deliver on this target at the local level; whether that’s planting trees on land they own or helping us identify opportunities in their local area.

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)<sup>24</sup>:

- Trees Call to Action Fund

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<sup>24</sup> Forestry Commission advice

- Woodland Creation Planning Grant
- HS2 Woodland Fund
- Urban Tree Challenge Fund
- Local Authority Treescapes Fund
- England Woodland Creation Offer
- 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)
- Highways England Environment and Wellbeing Designated Fund Plan
- National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative
- NGO and charity tree funding schemes
- 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