

### 3.3 Tree and Woodland Challenges in the West of England

There are a number of challenges to both protecting and managing our existing trees and woodland, and to establishing new trees and woodland. These challenges are set out below in the West of England context. For each challenge, the determined solution and the relevant key partners in implementing each solution have been identified. These solutions have, in turn, been used to inform the Five-Year Action Plan contained in section 2.2.2, and will be used in

the future to inform longer-term actions plans, and the design of projects and incentives for increasing tree and woodland cover.

These issues are colour coded according to the following scheme:

Colour	Key
	General
	Agriculture
	Urban and residential

#### Existing Trees and Woodlands

**Challenge: Loss of trees through Ash Dieback and other disease**

16% of the West of England’s trees are Ash and will be affected by Ash dieback, with up to 85% of these expected to die

**Solution:** Share expertise and resources to help manage this decline and factor this loss in to our tree planting and natural regeneration targets. We also need to ensure we do not import new disease, by using natural regeneration where appropriate, planting trees sourced and grown in the UK, and/or supporting local tree nurseries with strong biosecurity practices.

**Partners:** Local authorities, WECA, WENP, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, Forest of Avon Trust

**Challenge: Decline and loss of trees due to climate change**

Depending on the modelled change, common species such as Beech and Sycamore could be adversely affected by a changed climate by 2080.<sup>48</sup>

**Solution:** Positively address this change through management advice to tree and woodland owners, which is particularly critical in maintaining the ecology and character of priority woodland habitats. Consider the planting of alternative species and/or more southerly seed sources that are more resilient to climate change, and where they may be appropriate to plant.

**Partners:** Forest of Avon Trust, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, FWAG

<sup>48</sup> Tree species suitability in a future climate in, South-West England Forest Research.

**Challenge: Ensuring the right tree in the right place**

There are some instances where the wrong trees have been planted in the wrong place previously or are inappropriately managed, affecting sensitive landscapes and/or ecology. This may include overcrowding of trees in woodlands, ancient woodland sites being planted with commercial species in the 20th Century, wildlife-rich meadows being planted on, or loss of important views.

**Solution:** Be transparent about and communicate that trees (or certain trees) are not appropriate in all places and the need to conserve sensitive landscapes and ecology, as well as the ecological value of more open wooded landscapes. Improve communications on tree and woodland management and ensure landowners and relevant stakeholders are well informed on this subject. While ensuring no net deforestation, seek to restore priority habitats, views and landscape character by removing trees where appropriate; and manage woodlands through thinning and felling where this would improve their value to wildlife and people.

This will be facilitated by a comprehensive and robust database that enables assessment of where tree planting is proposed.

**Partners:** Local authorities, WECA, Avon Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, Forest of Avon Trust

**Challenge: Low levels of woodland management**

Despite a successful targeted approach by the Forest of Avon Trust to contacting and producing management plans for woodland owners, many smaller private woodlands are not yet managed and woodland SSSIs are often not in favourable condition. There is also a risk of large areas of new woodland being created and not managed. This reduces the ecological value of woodlands, as well as reducing the provision of other ecosystem services.

**Solution:** Making use of Biodiversity Net Gain (which requires a commitment to 30 years of management), the ELM Scheme and other funding sources, we need to offer a suite of measures to improve woodland management: targeted woodland and riparian tree management advice, support for management co-operatives, and developing links with local markets. The forestry sector should be supported and worked with to achieve this objective.

Where owners are focused on biodiversity objectives, promote the value of wood pasture and other open wooded landscapes, and the role of cattle and other grazing herbivores as an alternative means of woodland management.

**Partners:** Forest of Avon Trust, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust, Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership, Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (riparian)

**Challenge: High levels of grey squirrel and deer damage in establishing woodlands**

Even where timber production is not an objective, many woodlands are adversely affected by the presence of grey squirrels and overpopulation of deer (including damage to beech, oak and birch, and negative impact on woodland ground flora), reducing their long-term contribution to the landscape and biodiversity.

**Solution:** Promote greater awareness of the need for control measures and support the co-ordination of these across the land of like-minded landowners; and ensure all those involved in planting and natural regeneration are aware of the level of deer browsing and protect their trees appropriately. In the longer-term, reintroduction of pine marten in selected areas and management that is favourable for goshawks could be part of the response for grey squirrels.

**Partners:** Forestry Commission, Forest of Avon Trust, NFU, CLA, Woodland Trust

**Challenge: Low levels of regeneration of English oak**

Woodlands where oak occurs often have very few oak seedlings, causing low levels of regeneration, and as such the proportion of this important native species is likely to decline.

**Solution:** Promote small-scale selective planting and protection, creating glades fenced from deer as necessary, the use of well-managed grazing regimes, and establishing unplanted peripheral areas for natural regeneration.

**Partners:** Forest of Avon Trust, Woodland Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust

**Challenge: Need for better understanding of our tree canopy cover and the services it provides**

There is a lack of comprehensive understanding of woodland cover and the state of woodland in the West of England. Better data would facilitate better-informed tree planting, woodland creation and woodland management.

**Solution:** There are a range of methodologies through which canopy cover, carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services provided by trees and woodland can be calculated. Agree a consistent approach across the West of England and commission work to ensure all authorities have compatible data.

**Partners:** WENP, WECA, local authorities, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust

**Challenge: Poor management of riparian trees and woodland**

If well managed, riparian trees are a crucial component of the health of rivers. They provide shade, helping to cool rivers, which is important for many species of fish; provide habitat and food for river creatures; and form ecological corridors in the wider landscape. However, poorly managed riparian trees can also negatively impact in-river ecology due to overshading.

**Solution:** BART's approach to tree planting provides a useful reference for riparian habitat creation and management, and its use should be promoted. Support BART in managing and creating trees and woodland in a riparian context, and in advising landowners.

**Partners:** BART, BACP

**Challenge: Long-term decline in hedgerow quality**

Many hedgerows are annually trimmed to a low height, some are affected by close cultivation, and others suffer from a lack of management. All can affect their landscape and ecological value, and their agricultural benefits.

**Solution:** Continue to work with farmers and contractors to promote rotational and/or profile trimming of hedgerows, and the retention of developing field trees. Utilise the ELM Scheme to financially incentivise farmers to better manage hedgerows.

**Partners:** Natural England, FWAG, NFU, Avon Wildlife Trust

**Challenge: Loss of field and hedgerow boundary trees**

In many areas, outgrown hedgerows, and hedgerow and field trees are a significant landscape feature. Ash dieback disease, recurrent Dutch elm disease and/or ageing tree stock threatens these features, with many potential trees cut low as part of hedgerow management.

**Solution:** Continue to work with farmers and contractors to promote the benefit of trees within the farmed landscape and to tag potential hedgerow trees. Utilise the upcoming ELM Scheme to protect and manage existing trees and hedgerows, and establish new ones in the farmed environment.

Additionally, agroforestry provides a mechanism for integrating trees into the farmed environment while maintaining, or even increasing, output and is appropriate for both arable and grazing regimes. Its uptake could be incentivised through the ELM Scheme and better communicating its benefits to farmers.

**Partners:** Natural England, FWAG, NFU, Avon Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, Forest of Avon Trust

**Challenge: Loss of traditional orchards**

Traditional orchards have historically been an important feature of the West of England, and, as well as being economically productive, are valuable for biodiversity due to their mix of habitats and the presence of dead wood. However, research from the people's trust for endangered species suggests that 90% of traditional orchards have been lost since the 1950s nationwide.<sup>49</sup>

**Solution:** Work with farmers and landowners to promote the benefits of traditional orchards and utilise the ELM Scheme to prioritise the creation of new orchards in the West of England.

Utilise public land to establish community orchards as a resource for both people and wildlife.

**Partners:** Natural England, FWAG, NFU, Woodland Trust, Forest of Avon Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust, local authorities

<sup>49</sup> <https://ptes.org/campaigns/traditional-orchard-project/traditional-orchard-decline/>

**Challenge: Local authority tree and woodland budgets are under increasing pressure due to funding cuts and the need to respond to Ash Dieback Disease**

Provision of trees is not a statutory service, and providing and managing urban trees is expensive due to factors including health and safety considerations, and insuring against potential litigation. Planting in streets where it delivers the greatest benefits can also be costly due to the presence of service infrastructure.

**Solution:** In making the case for urban trees (often on local authority land) to grant funders and business investors, clearly set out these additional costs and highlight the extra benefits provided by well-located trees. Engage proactively with businesses to leverage private financing for urban trees, as well as identifying solutions that support local authorities in providing public goods.

**Partners:** Local authorities, businesses, Bristol Green Capital Partnership

**Challenge: Removal of shrubs and trees from gardens**

While planning regulations may limit the conversion of gardens to non-porous surfacing, many shrubs and trees are removed to, for example, accommodate additional parking and/or building extensions.

**Solution:** Draw upon the interest in tree planting to promote 'Garden Forests' and 'Street Orchards' that enable people to take action while being given guidance on considerations when planting in private gardens and suitable species. We also need to communicate the importance of shrubs, trees and other wild areas to both wildlife and people's health and wellbeing.

**Partners:** Forest of Avon Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust, local authorities

**Challenge: Housing and other infrastructure development can require the removal of existing trees and shrubs**

While there are policies to ensure that trees are replaced, these do not necessarily reflect the range of benefits the felled, often larger, trees provided.

**Solution:** Ensure that measures like the mitigation hierarchy, Bristol Tree Replacement Standard, and the Biodiversity Net Gain metric for street trees are thoroughly and consistently applied to avoid the unnecessary felling of trees and, where felling is required, ensure that new trees are planted in suitable areas.

**Partners:** Local authorities, WECA, WENP

**Challenge: Opposition by some members of the public to approved tree and woodland management**

Trees and woodlands need to be managed, which may include pruning, thinning and/or felling trees, in the context of felling licences and other approvals. Whilst there is rightly concern about tree and woodland work where it may be in breach of the law, this can extend to legal and useful tree or woodland work.

**Solution:** Ensure that processes are transparent and promote a wider understanding of tree and woodland management as part of a dynamic ecosystem.

**Partners:** Local authorities, Forestry England, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust

**Challenge: Inequalities in access to trees and woodland**

Access on foot to trees and woodlands varies, reflecting not only their distribution, but also the access rights provided.

**Solution:** Address these issues through individual and group tree planting in streets and housing, and new community woodlands; and through new woodlands with permissive or wider access agreements.

**Partners:** Local authorities (trees and urban areas), Forest of Avon Trust, Woodland Trust, BART, FWAG (rural areas)

## Establishing New Trees and Woodlands

**Challenge: Lack of a single plan showing where woodland can be created with the greatest benefit**

While the Forest of Avon Plan identifies broad priorities for tree and woodland planting, and the NRN mapping shows the most ecologically valuable sites for new woodland, there is no map showing the best locations for tree planting and woodland creation in the West of England based on a combination of ecological value, land use, ecosystem services and landscape sensitivity.

**Solution:** A single map that brings together NRN mapping, opportunity mapping, ecosystem service mapping, and (if possible) landscape sensitivity would provide a coherent and detailed spatial plan for the whole of the West of England – this could be done through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) that will be required by the Environment Bill. National mapping, including the development of a national NRN and natural capital mapping, should also be utilised.

**Partners:** WENP, WECA, local authorities

**Challenge:** Plans or online resources do not always result in tree and woodland planting taking place in the right areas.

While maps, plans and online resources such as the West of England NRN mapping, MAGIC, FoE's Opportunity Woodland Mapping and the Forestry Commission Low Risk mapping for woodland highlight the most suitable areas for trees and woodland, this does not necessarily translate into trees being planted or woodland created in these areas.

**Solution:** This strategy sets out Tree and Woodland Principles (Section 4) and Priorities by Landscape Character Area (LCA) (Section 5), guiding tree and woodland planting to ensure that it maximises benefits and does not conflict with opportunities for other priority habitats or productive agriculture, and takes into account landscape character.

The Forest of Avon Trust and other partners should be supported in promoting this guidance and more widely advising on, supporting (including detailed planning) and co-ordinating action, working with partners across the West of England.

**Partners:** WENP, Forest of Avon Trust

**Challenge:** Significant community interest in tree planting does not always result in a well planted tree, of a suitable species and/or in the right place.

The Climate Emergency has focused the attention of many individuals and groups on wanting to plant trees to sequester carbon. While this is incredibly positive, some of this interest is directed at planting in areas unsuitable for trees and/or with little reference to establishment.

**Solution:** Promote the Tree and Woodland Principles (Section 4) and Priorities by LCA (Section 5) in this strategy, providing a reference point for local groups and individuals; and support the Forest of Avon Trust's role in advising, supporting and co-ordinating action by these groups.

**Partners:** WENP, Forest of Avon Trust, local authorities, Avon Wildlife Trust

**Challenge:** Without co-ordination, Trees for Climate and other funding streams could confuse potential planting partners.

There are a growing range of tree and woodland planting offers, grants and funding streams, as set out in Section 2.2.5, which partners may not be aware of and which may be confusing.

**Solution:** Support the Forest of Avon Trust's role in co-ordinating these offers and ensuring their alignment with the Tree and Woodland Strategy. More detailed guidance could be produced making clear the purpose and suitability of each of these funding streams.

**Partners:** WENP, Forest of Avon Trust, BACP

**Challenge: Potential shortage of trees to plant in our area and nationally.**

The demand for trees may outstrip the supply of young trees provided by UK nursery capacity, slowing down tree planting and jeopardising regional and national targets.

**Solution:** Review and support existing nursery capacity in the West of England, and support the establishment of new nurseries through Local Plan policies and practical support for community-based nurseries at sites such as Avon Wildlife Trust's Grow Wilder site.

**Partners:** WECA, local authorities, Woodland Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust

**Challenge: People and organisations have varying and sometimes conflicting priorities when establishing trees.**

Establishment of trees will be undertaken by diverse individuals and organisations, according to their own objectives, which may conflict with the priorities of others. For example, planting of conifers could sequester carbon and contribute to a more sustainable local timber economy but would not provide the same benefits to biodiversity or landscape character as native woodland.

**Solution:** Promote the detailed Tree and Woodland Principles (Section 4) and Priorities by LCA (Section 5), and actively engage with those interested in increasing tree cover to ensure that new planting and woodland creation maximises benefits across all ecosystem services. There needs to be a recognition and an understanding of the differing motivations and barriers that will inform landowners' decisions on whether to establish new trees and woodlands, and what form any new trees and woodlands should take.

Collaboration across partners, utilising existing partnerships such as WENP and BACP, can facilitate projects that deliver for the priorities of multiple organisations.

**Partners:** WENP, BACP, Forest of Avon Trust

**Challenge: Lack of funding for more dynamic and open wooded habitats.**

While there are a growing range of tree and woodland planting offers, grants and funding streams, as set out in Section 2.2.5, these are not always applicable to more dynamic, open wooded habitats, such as wood pasture, 'rewilded' areas or mosaic habitats, especially when outcomes are uncertain. These habitats are particularly important for nature's recovery.

**Solution:** We need to review the suitability of existing and future funding streams for more complex wooded habitats and identify innovative funding options, including private financing, for these habitats. We also need to better communicate the benefits of these habitats for wildlife and other ecosystem services to funders and landowners.

**Partners:** WENP, BACP, Avon Wildlife Trust, Forest of Avon Trust

**Challenge: Newly created woodlands may not have sufficient protection to ensure that they become the ancient woodlands of the future.**

While new woodland is crucial as part of the response to the climate and ecological emergencies in the here and now, we also need to ensure that the woodlands we create last long into the future, becoming the ancient woodlands of the 25th century.

**Solution:** Appropriate legal protection needs to be put in place to safeguard newly created woodland, which would thereby ensure its survival in perpetuity. However, to do so will also require landowners to either be committed to safeguarding woodlands or to otherwise be confident in long-term funding being available when committing to permanent land use change.

**Partners:** WENP, WECA, local authorities, Natural England, Forest of Avon Trust

**Challenge: Grant funding may be insufficient to encourage landowners to plant woodlands in priority areas.**

The values of grants and/or public funding may not be sufficient to encourage the establishment of woodlands in priority areas; this is particularly the case where land values are high, such as close to urban centres, and where woodland establishment will lead to loss of agricultural income.

**Solution:** As well as a proactive contact programme and communication of our evidence base, make use of other funding opportunities (including private financing for nature-based solutions, Biodiversity Net Gain and sustainable forestry) to incentivise the establishment woodland in key areas. Agroforestry should also be promoted as a means of increasing woodland cover in farmed landscapes.

**Partners:** WENP, BACP, WECA, local authorities, Avon Wildlife Trust, NFU, FWAG

**Challenge: Funding schemes for urban trees do not reflect lifetime costs of planting and care.**

The landowner (often a local authority) becomes responsible for paying for the long-term public benefit of trees, which, at a time of budgetary constraints, acts as a disincentive to investment in urban tree and woodland planting.

**Solution:** Identify and apply innovative solutions such as private funding for urban trees to ensure sufficient resources is available for planting and care. Further develop evidence of societal benefits of urban trees to encourage investment in long-term management/maintenance.

**Partners:** Local authorities, WECA, WENP, businesses

**Challenge: High cost to retrofit trees into urban streetscapes.**

Although trees are more easily integrated into new developments, the growing awareness of the importance of urban trees is often not matched by funding for tree planting in existing urban areas that reflects the costs of finding sites and establishing trees in these complex environments.

**Solution:** We need to make a robust funding case for the multiple benefits and the long-term costs of planting and maintaining trees in existing urban areas and, as per the point above, identify innovative solutions to fund this.

**Partners:** Local authorities, WECA, WENP

**Challenge: Planning agreements for trees and woodlands often do not reflect their long-term costs.**

Once established, responsibility for trees in developments may be passed on to a local authority, housing association or a company. If costs are not adequately reflected in management agreements, or if there is insufficient oversight, trees may grow poorly or fail.

**Solution:** Bristol City Council's SPD is a good example of an approach that addresses these costs until Year 15; planning agreements will need to be put in place to address any long-term costs. Biodiversity Net Gain should also help to address this.

**Partners:** Local authorities, WECA

**Challenge: While the importance of trees and woodlands to people and the environment is increasingly acknowledged, this is not always translated to developer plans or planning agreements.**

A retained hedgerow boundary or perhaps access to an existing right of way can be the sum of new residents' interaction with informal greenspace. Given the significant benefits that green spaces have for health and wellbeing, this is a missed opportunity.

**Solution:** Use the West of England JGIS and local GI Strategies to facilitate delivery of integrated green infrastructure. Mechanisms including Biodiversity Net Gain and the Building with Nature Standard can be used to both protect existing trees and create more tree and woodland cover within developments, with public access provided wherever possible.

Continued engagement with developers to ensure that trees and other green spaces are embedded throughout new developments.

**Partners:** Local authorities, WECA