

48 cross-sector organisations unite to call for a UK Charter for Trees, Woods and People

The Woodland Trust is leading 47* organisations in a campaign to celebrate the value of our trees and woods and secure their future by creating a new **Charter for Trees, Woods and People**.

The new charter will be launched in November 2017, which marks 800 years since Henry III signed the original Charter of the Forest. This influential charter protected and restored the rights of people to access and use the Royal Forests.

Today, our nation's woods and trees are facing unprecedented pressures from development, pests and diseases and climate change. They risk being neglected, undervalued and forgotten. Now is the time to create a new charter, a broader charter that recognises the importance of trees in our society, celebrates their enormous contribution to our lives, and acts now so that future generations can benefit from them too.

The coalition's ambition is that the principles set out in the 2017 charter will articulate the relationship between people and trees in the UK in the 21st century. The charter will provide guidance and inspiration for policy, practice, innovation and enjoyment. Redefining the everyday benefits that we all gain from woods and trees in our lives, for everyone, from Government to businesses, communities and individuals.

Local groups, clubs, councils and committees will be encouraged to take part by bringing people together to celebrate the woods and trees at the heart of their communities and help feed ideas and stories into the building of the charter. The 48 Charter Steering Group organisations are also looking to recruit local 'Charter Champions' who will ensure their community is represented in this ambitious project, able to seize this unique opportunity to define the future for woods and trees in the UK and make their voices heard.

Guidance and information will be provided during the campaign to inspire and support local activities, and to help people create a lasting legacy in communities across the UK. Funding will be available for local events, activities and projects that reconnect people and trees. Anyone involved will be part of a UK-wide network of groups leading local events and will represent communities in this UK wide conversation about the future of woods and trees.

The charter will be rooted in stories and memories that show us how trees have shaped our society, landscape and lives. To kick the campaign off, the organisations involved are asking people from all corners of the UK to share their 'tree stories' of treasured or significant moments in their lives that would not have been possible without trees, to help create a charter that reflects the true meaning and value of trees and woods to the people of the UK.

Beccy Speight, Woodland Trust CEO said: "Our collective ambition is for a charter that puts trees back at the heart of our lives, communities and decision making -where they belong. The charter will provide guidance and inspiration to allow us all to appreciate, preserve and celebrate our trees and woods for what they do for us in so many different ways. Inspired by something that happened 800 years ago, there is no better time than now to shine the spotlight again on the benefits that trees and woods bring to us all today and to future generations."

Why does the UK need a new Charter for Trees, Woods and People?

Changing lifestyles, busy schedules, and increased 'screen-time' mean more people feel disconnected from nature and what it does for us today than ever before. Society and Government

need to stop taking trees for granted, recognise and celebrate their huge contribution** to our lives, and take shared responsibility for securing their future.

Trees and woods are hugely valuable for our health, happiness and our children's development. Only 51% of children achieve the recommended hour of physical activity each day (girls just 38%, compared with 62% for boys)¹, and research shows that just having trees close to residential areas encourages increased outdoor exercise³. Other research highlighted that asthma rates in children fell by 25% for every additional 343 trees per square kilometre² in their local area.

The State of Nature report shows 60% of woodland wildlife species surveyed are in decline across the UK⁴. In addition, habitat loss, through development and more intensive land use have contributed to increasingly fragmented habitats and species decline. Development, poor management and disturbance continue to threaten these fragments of habitat, and wildlife here is isolated and vulnerable. Reductions in enrolments on forestry, land management and environmental courses compounds the problem through a lack of skilled and informed practitioners.

Valuable habitats are still under threat, the area of new woodland created annually continues to fall, far too few trees are being planted to achieve a better connected landscape, and the impact of tree disease will undermine this further. Research for the Woodland Trust by Europe Economics found that woods and trees deliver £270bn worth of benefits to society. This makes the call for a charter more important than ever.

Find out more at: <https://treecharter.uk/>

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Notes to editor:

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1. Woodland Trust, Healthy Woods: Healthy Lives. Townsend, M. (2013) <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/mediafile/100263109/cs-wt-2014-healthy-woods-healthy-lives.pdf?cb=ef6a1f88cc8c42ed8cb0420665985394>
2. Columbia University researchers found asthma rates among children aged four and five fell by a quarter for every additional 343 trees per square kilometre. Lovasi, G., Quinn, J., Neckerman, K., Perzanowski, M. & Rundle, A. (2008) 'Children living in areas with more street trees have lower prevalence of asthma.' Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 62(7), pp. 647-649.
3. 'Greenspace, urbanity and health: relationships in England', Mitchell R & Popham F, Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. 61: pp681-683, 2007.
4. RSPB State of Nature Report 2013. https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/stateofnature_tcm9-345839.pdf

**Today, woods and trees continue to give us so much: timber for our buildings and furniture; habitats for our wildlife; places for us to unwind, refresh and recharge; as well as protection from sun, rain and pollution.

Woods and trees are also pivotal in the battle against climate change. Trees absorb CO₂ as they grow, storing one tonne of carbon for every cubic metre of timber, so the more forests we plant the more CO₂ we can absorb. Wood products and building materials lock that carbon away for many years. Wood from sustainably managed forests can actually be better than carbon neutral.

Trees in urban areas are essential. They provide clean air, natural flood defences, a barrier to noise, can help improve physical health and mental well-being, mitigate against the urban heat island effect (UHI), deliver pollution absorption, provide wildlife habitat, as well as much needed recreational spaces in cities, providing contact with nature and sensory outdoor learning resources.

***The organisations involved in the call for a Charter include:** Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association UK, Ancient Tree Forum, Arboricultural Association (AA), Bat Conservation Trust, Black Environment Network, Borders Forest Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Campaign Strategy, Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape Partnership, Common Ground, Community Woodlands Association, Confor, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), GreenBlue Urban, Grown in Britain, Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF), Legal Sustainability Alliance LSA, Llais y Goedwig, Mersey Forest, National Association of Local Councils, National Trust, National Union of Students, Natural Resources Wales, Northern Ireland Environment Link, Plantlife, Red Rose Forest, Royal Forestry Society (RFS), Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), RSPB, Small Woods Association, Soil Association, Small Woodland Owners' Group (SWOG), Sylva Foundation, TDAG (Trees and design action group), The Centre For Sustainable Healthcare, The Conservation Foundation, The Land Trust, The National Forest, The Sherwood Forest Trust, The Tree Council, The Wildlife Trusts, The Windsor Estate, Trees for Cities, The Wild Network, Woodlands.co.uk, Woodland Heritage.

The 1217 Charter of the Forest

In 1217, two years after the Magna Carta was signed by King John, his heir Henry III signed the Charter of the Forest. The aim of this document was to protect the rights of people to access and use the Royal Forests. The Charter of the Forest provides a window to a time in history when access to woods was integral to daily life. Being denied access for grazing livestock, collecting firewood and foraging for food was a real concern for the people of the time.