

A Forest Habitat Network for Edinburgh and the Lothians



An example of how the characteristic landscape of Midlothian can be enhanced by using targeted new planting to extend the Forest Habitat Network.

Edinburgh and the Lothians

Areas of woodland in Scotland have long been reduced to small fragments, resulting in their plant and animal species becoming isolated. Therefore the rationale for a Forest Habitat Network is to re-establish the links between woodland fragments, to benefit wildlife and to enhance access opportunities for people.

Edinburgh and the Lothians have 22,000 hectares of woodland, representing 13% of its total land area. The woodlands vary from narrow shelterbelts and conifer plantations to patches of ancient woodland in river gorges- these have the highest biodiversity value (greater range of species and habitats) and represent remnants of the ancient woodland that used to cover much of Scotland.

Due to the pressures of land clearance for farming and more recently through urban development, this once wooded landscape has become increasingly fragmented over the years.

The need for a Forest Habitat Network

There is an increased urgency to try and address this fragmentation, which has led to the creation of a partnership between three Local Authorities, Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland. The result is the production of Forest Habitat Network maps that can be used to identify woodland management priorities and areas to target for new planting.

This work will also provide information on species and habitats necessary for woodlands to thrive and continue to play an important role in the area's landscape and people's lives.

The Forest Habitat Network documents can be downloaded from the Edinburgh & Lothian pages at:

<http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/habitatnetworks>

“...supporting a rich variety of plants and animals, woodland within habitat networks can provide valuable recreational opportunities for communities.”

Planning a healthy urban environment

The development of a Forest Habitat Network can provide the setting for new urban areas, support a rich variety of plants and animals and provide valuable recreational opportunities for communities. With a population of nearly 780,000 people and a growing demand for housing, there is a need in the region to manage development to ensure it provides an attractive landscape in which people will want to live and work.

A Forest Habitat Network for Edinburgh and the Lothians provides an important tool to help planners and developers deliver the benefits of sustainable development objectives, including landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage.

Fifteen Core Development Areas have been identified within the Edinburgh and the Lothian Structure Plan 2015 to try and meet new housing requirements in the next 10 years. It is important that new developments are integrated into the local landscape. Well-designed woodland can help achieve this as well as improving the environmental quality of specific areas.

The principles and design criteria set down in Local Plans and this Forest Habitat Network study, will guide developers towards delivering a high quality local environment for existing and new communities to value and enjoy. Planning applications will be expected to address these principles and design criteria and the guidelines provided overleaf should apply to all circumstances.



The Guidelines

The importance of woodlands and greenspace is well recognised and has been the subject of planning guidance and advice notes. These include NPPG 14: Natural Heritage; PAN 60: Planning for Natural Heritage; PAN 65: Planning and Open Space (which make recommendations on the role and benefit of woodlands in delivering the Scottish Executive's sustainable development agenda).

Developers should refer to this guidance when designing new developments to minimise detrimental impacts on existing woodlands and greenspace and when designing new woodlands. Planners will also use the guidance to assess the design quality and how proposed new woodlands within Core Development Areas contribute towards the Forest Habitat Network. Plans for new woodland should:

- assess the distribution of native woodland in the locality, its location, size, biodiversity quality and management regimes;
- consider the composition of native woodlands in the locality - soil type will also provide an indication of which species, or woodland type, should be planted;
- propose woodlands of native tree and shrub species, preferably from approved local seed sources;
- include some larger woodland patches (minimum 100m x 100m) to provide future core woodland, where appropriate;
- link with other features such as hedgerows and street trees.

Additional Sources of Information

FC Bulletin 112 Creating New Native Woodlands
FC Bulletin 124 An Ecological Site Classification for Forestry in Great Britain
FC Practice Note 8 Using Local Stock for Planting Native Trees and Shrubs
FCS Guidance Note 9 Site Survey Requirements for New Native Woodland
FCS Guidance Note 20 Forest Habitat Networks Woodland Networks for Wildlife and People – FC/SNH publication
Local Forest Habitat Network Plans published by FC/SNH
FC Handbook 5 Urban Forestry Practice
FC Handbook 11 Creating and Managing Woodlands around Towns
FC Community Woodland Design Guidelines
Scottish Native Woods publication Restoring and Managing Riparian Woodland
FC Forests and Water Guidelines
Water Framework Directive
FC Information Note 7 – Evaluating biodiversity in fragmented landscapes: principles
FR habitat network website –
www.forestresearch.gov.uk/habitatnetworks

Further Information

We encourage you to contact Forestry Commission Scotland staff at an early stage of planning, especially in Core Development Areas, so that you are aware of the woodland grant funds available and the standards required. We can also provide a list of forestry agents and specialists who may be able to help.

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