



The Woodland Trust
Grantham
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Telephone
Email

26th March 2018

Re: Consultation on Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan

Woodland Trust response

Thank you very much for consulting the Woodland Trust on your neighbourhood plan for Hednesford, we very much appreciate the opportunity. Neighbourhood planning is an important mechanism for also embedding trees into local communities, as such we are very supportive of some of the policies set out in your plan.

Vision, Key Issues and Opportunities

The Woodland Trust is pleased to see that your Mission Statement identifies the environment and open spaces as being part of your Vision for Hednesford. Also, your key issues acknowledges the need to protect and enhance small areas of public open space, and your Neighbourhood Plan does seek to protect and enhance the character of Cannock Chase as a AONB.

Whilst the profile and description for your Neighbourhood Plan identifies the need to retain and enhance Hednesford and its largely urban character, and also the need for development to integrate with the landscape. Given that Neighbourhood Plans are a great opportunity to think about how trees can also enhance your community and the lives of its residents, the natural environment and tree and woodland conservation in Hednesford, should also be taken into account as an objective in your Plan.

Trees are some of the most important features of the area for local people. This is being acknowledged with the Cannock Chase Local Plan (2014), which identifies the fact that trees are an important part of the character and visual amenity, and they can play a significant role in well-designed development proposals. Policy CP14 (Landscape Character and Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), seeks to maintain and extend tree cover, and also through the retention of important trees. Therefore, this should also be taken into account as a Key Issue in the Neighbourhood Plan for Hednesford, and Matter D should be amended to include the following:

“Ensure small areas of public open space which are valued by the community, particularly those below the scale identified to be protected as Greenspace Network on the Local Plan Policies Map, **and also any ancient and veteran trees** are retained for the benefit of the local community and enhanced when opportunities arise”.

Town Centre Policies

We are pleased to see that one of the Hednesford Town Centre Policies (TC5) acknowledges the need for environmental improvements, so as to conserve and also enhancing the landscape in your Neighbourhood Plan for Hednesford, but this should also recognise the fact that development should not lead to loss or degradation of trees in your parish. Increasing the amount of trees and woods in Hednesford will provide enhanced green infrastructure for your local communities, and also mitigate against the future loss of trees to disease (eg Ash dieback), with a new generation of trees both in woods and also outside woods in streets, hedgerows and amenity sites.

Information can be found here: <http://www.magic.gov.uk/MagicMap.asp> and <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/discoveries/interactivemap/>

Ancient woodland would benefit from strengthened protection building on the National Planning Policy Forum (NPPF). On 5th March 2018 the Prime Minister Theresa May launched the draft revised NPPF for consultation. Paragraph 173 c states:

development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable mitigation strategy exists. Where development would involve the loss of individual aged or veteran trees that lie outside ancient woodland, it should be refused unless the need for, and benefits of, development in that location would clearly outweigh the loss;

Whilst recognising that this policy is draft we believe it must be given due weight in the plan making process as it shows a clear direction of travel from central Government to strengthen the protection of irreplaceable ancient woodland.

Therefore, we would recommend that Policy TC 5 should also include:

“Substantial harm to or loss of irreplaceable habitats such as trees, should be wholly exceptional”.

The Woodland Trust would suggest that your Neighbourhood Plan is more specific about ancient tree protection. For example, the introduction and background to the consultation on the Kimbolton Neighbourhood Development Plan (2017), identified the importance of ancient woodland, and how it should be protected and enhanced. Also, we would like to see buffering distances set out. For example, for most types of development (i.e. residential), a planted buffer strip of 50m would be preferred to protect the core of the woodland. Standing Advice from Natural England and the Forestry Commission has some useful information: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

We would like to see the importance of trees and woodland recognised for providing healthy living and recreation also being taken into account with your Neighbourhood Plan for Hednesford. In an era of ever increasing concern about the nation’s physical and mental health, the Woodland Trust strongly believes that trees and woodland can play a key role in delivering improved health & wellbeing at a local level. Whilst, at the same time, the Health & Social Care Act 2012 has passed much of the responsibility for health & wellbeing to upper-tier and unitary local authorities, and this is reinforced by the Care Act 2014. Also, each new house being built in your parish should require a new street tree, and also car parks must have trees within them.

Open Space Policies

Whilst open spaces are being acknowledged as being the basic amenities needed for a village, currently Policy OS 1 in your Neighbourhood Plan does not also seek to retain and enhance recreational and local green spaces, resist the loss of open space, whilst also ensuring the provision of some more, therefore, to what extent there is considered to be enough accessible space in your community also needs to be taken into account. There are Natural England and Forestry Commission standards which can be used with developers on this:

The Woodland Access Standard aspires:

- That no person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2ha in size.
- That there should also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20ha within 4km (8km round trip) of people’s homes.

The Woodland Trust also believes that trees and woodlands can deliver a major contribution to resolving a range of water management issues, particularly those resulting from climate change, like flooding and the water quality implications caused by extreme weather events. This is important in the area covered by your Neighbourhood Plan because trees offer opportunities to make positive water use change, whilst also contributing to other objectives, such as biodiversity, timber & green infrastructure - see the Woodland Trust publication ***Stemming the flow*** – the role of trees and woods in flood protection - <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2014/05/stemming-the-flow/>.

Woodland Trust Publications

We would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to the Woodland Trust's neighbourhood planning microsite: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/campaigning/neighbourhood-planning/> which may give you further ideas for your plan.

Also, the Woodland Trust have recently released a planners manual which is a multi-purpose document and is intended for policy planners, such as community groups preparing Neighbourhood Plans. Our guide can be found at: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/mediafile/100820409/planning-for-ancient-woodland-planners-manual-for-ancient-woodland-and-veterandtrees.pdf?cb=8298cbf2eaa34c7da329eee3bd8d48ff>

In addition other Woodland Trust research which may assist with taking your Neighbourhood Plan foreword is a policy and practice section on our website, which provides lots of more specific evidence on more specific issues such as air quality, pollution and tree disease: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/>

Our evidence base is always expanding through vigorous programme of PhDs and partnership working. So please do check back or get in touch if you have a specific query. You may also be interested in our free community tree packs, schools and community groups can claim up to 420 free trees every planting season: <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/community-tree-pack/>

If I can be of any assistance please do not hesitate to get in touch, I would be more than happy to discuss this further with you. If you require any further information or would like to discuss specific issues please do not hesitate to contact Victoria Bankes Price – Planning Advisor

Best wishes and good luck with your plan

Ian Lings – Local Planning Support Volunteer

On behalf of the Woodland Trust