

*A round barrow in open space – the open space extends to a public right of way to provide views of this scheduled monument.
Credit: David Robertson*

Forestry, the historic environment and climate change: the opportunities associated with putting the right tree in the right place

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With a UK target to plant 30,000ha of trees per year by 2025 and 180,000ha of woodland in England by the end of 2042 (DEFRA 2020; HM Government 2018, 26), the role of trees and forests is central to UK governments' climate change response. Whilst it is understandable that there are concerns about the impact these ambitions may have on our historic environment, the climate crisis is a clear and present issue for us and for future generations. With such grand ambitions, it is important that due care and diligence is placed on a whole range of different considerations ranging from the loss of existing important habitats, the planting of peat to the impact on known historic environment assets. Fortunately for us, forestry within the UK looks to follow the legal and good forestry practice requirements set out by the UK Forestry Standard (Forestry Commission 2017).

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is

'the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK. It outlines the context for forestry, sets out the approach of the UK governments to sustainable forest management, defines standards and requirements, and provides a basis for regulation and monitoring – including national and international reporting.'

To achieve its aims, the UKFS is divided into eight elemental categories: General Forestry Practices, Biodiversity, Soil, Water, Landscape, People, Climate Change, and the Historic Environment. Each element has its own chapter and within these are subject-specific requirements and guidelines (many of which overlap).

UKFS guidelines

'explain the principles of the various elements of sustainable forest management in further detail and set out how the UKFS Requirements can be met. The Guidelines provide guidance and advice for forest and woodland managers and practitioners based on current, relevant research and experience. They form the basis for assessing proposals, management operations and activities to ensure the sustainability of UK forests and woodlands.'

The requirements and guidelines are also the criteria that woodland creation is assessed against to determine significant harm during the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process (under the EIA (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 as amended). In an EIA context, afforestation is defined as conversion of non-woodland land use into woodland or forest by means of planting or facilitating the natural regeneration of trees to form woodland cover, including short rotation coppice and short rotation forestry (the latter includes Christmas tree plantations). Planting or natural regeneration of less than 0.5ha is not considered afforestation under the regulations, unless it is next to another woodland creation project completed within the last five years.

The historic environment offers many opportunities to afforestation projects and therefore the UK's climate change response. With UKFS requiring the mapping and protection of important known historic features and guiding woodland creators to place them in open space, perhaps the most obvious benefit is the ongoing survival of the historic environment resource. Alongside designated assets, the current version of the UKFS lists long-established boundaries, walls, banks, hedgerows and veteran trees among the significant features to be afforded protection. In certain circumstances afforestation can provide a greater level of protection than existing land uses. An example might be the buried remains of a Neolithic or Bronze Age barrow in an arable field, which sees repeated disturbance from that cultivation – placing such a site within managed open space in new woodland would potentially give it a better chance of long-term survival. These open spaces also provide a mosaic of habitats within the woodland and offer up opportunities and considerations around biodiversity, ecosystem services and natural capital.



Although UKFS focuses on protecting known elements of the historic environment, it does make provision for additional research ahead of woodland creation. This can involve forest practitioners checking lidar images, historic maps and aerial photographs and undertaking visual surveys to locate on-the-ground features they have identified and that are recorded in Historic Environment Records; in many cases they may ask local authority historic environment advisers to help check sources for them. Guideline 8 encourages the recording of historic features and objects, then reporting them to the relevant historic environment service. Guideline 5 suggests the need to 'commission specialist surveys where evidence is significant'; in this way the UKFS takes a different approach to that of the planning system under the National Planning Policy Framework.

Protecting and managing historic features within woodland can also have important additional benefits. These can include reducing the amount of ground disturbance, helping to lock in carbon stored in the soil. Additionally, the UKFS highlights the importance of incorporating the information and data previously mentioned within forest plans, to ensure they are considered during future management activities. The incorporation of management plans for designated assets within forest plans may also allow for continued monitoring of sites that may be impacted by climatic influences caused by climate change.

Creating new woodland where there once was woodland can be an effective way to restore lost historic landscapes. In some situations, it may be appropriate to afforest agricultural land where former

Newly installed archaeological trail and interpretation associated with the scheduled forest of Micheldever. Credit: Lawrence Shaw



Part of a registered landscape park that was woodland until clear-felled in the 1970s and 80s and now a candidate for landscape restoration. Credit: David Robertson

woodland is shown on historic maps (although all proposals will need to be assessed against the other elements of sustainable forestry). This is also transferable to landscape parks, where woodland is integral to parkland design and development but has previously been felled, with the deforested land converted to other uses.

Finally, where landowners are supportive, access can be incorporated into a woodland creation design. At the most basic level this might facilitate the viewing of historic environment features from public rights of way, but it can include reinstating lost routeways as rides or linear open space (such as the line of a Roman road or medieval pilgrimage route, for example). The most-keen proposers can also be encouraged to interpret features within their new woodland, through panels, leaflets and digital media, with the narrative of changing land use, climate and the historic environment offering a golden thread that can be drawn upon.

References

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HM Government, 2018 *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*. London: DEFRA.



Lawrence Shaw

As the historic environment advisor for England's largest land manager, Lawrence has a breadth of experience when looking to implement the UKFS historic environment chapter both for afforestation and forest management. The nation's forests boast a fantastic array of archaeological sites, historic buildings and cultural landscapes, much of which survives today because of the forested nature that they find themselves within. Lawrence has also been working within the Forestry Commission's historic environment advisory team to facilitate government ambitions around woodland creation by improving and advancing processes and understanding within the sector, ensuring the best results for forestry and the historic environment.

David Robertson

David has been advising on the historic environment in forestry for more than 15 years. Initially this was for Norfolk County Council, working on forestry operations, felling licences, deforestation and woodland creation; in addition, he was secretary then chair of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers countryside committee. He spent two years providing historic environment advice for Forestry England in the East District, before moving into his current role in 2020. David currently advises on policy, guidance, regulation, grant schemes, training, and woodland creation and management casework.



Ceri Rutter

Ceri began her career as a field archaeologist, before pursuing specialisms in cultural landscape management and GIS applications in archaeology. She went on to work as a GIS specialist on a variety of heritage, environment and landscape projects for environmental and planning consultancies, and for Historic England in their mapping team. Ceri joined the Forestry Commission in September 2021, providing historic environment advice on woodland creation and management casework to area teams in the South of England and West Midlands.

