



Forestry England

Fishleigh Wood: a new woodland near Hatherleigh

**Consultation report and our
response to key issues raised**

September 2026



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1. Executive summary

Between Monday 6 July and Sunday 2 August 2026, we held a public consultation on proposals for the design of Fishleigh Wood, a new 135-hectare woodland we are planning to create to the north of Hatherleigh in Devon.

This report focuses on our approach to the consultation, summarises the main themes raised, and sets out our responses.

A total of 22 responses to the consultation were received from local residents and stakeholders. While most feedback was broadly supportive, responses also raised concerns, questions, and suggestions about specific aspects of the proposals.

After carefully considering all responses, we have updated our proposed designs for the new woodland to include the following changes:

- We have removed the proposed planting along the River Torridge and will allow riverside habitat, trees, and vegetation to develop naturally.
- Planting between existing woodland has been reduced in favour of natural colonisation, supplemented by small clusters of broadleaf planting.
- We have added additional scrub areas to the edges of proposed planting areas.

Over the coming weeks, we will be applying to the Forestry Commission for regulatory review ahead of planting the new woodland.

2. About the Consultation

2.1 Introduction

Forestry England is planning to create a new 135-hectare woodland, called Fishleigh Wood, on land to the north of Hatherleigh in Devon. We purchased this site with the aim of creating a healthy, resilient woodland that would be planted with a mix of conifer and broadleaf trees chosen to cope with future climate conditions.

Once established, Fishleigh Wood will provide space for wildlife, help absorb carbon, and support a greener economy by producing British-grown timber. The woodland will also be open for people to visit and enjoy as a new local green space.

This consultation invited local people and stakeholders to share their views on the proposed design and planting plans for Fishleigh Wood. The feedback we received will help shape the final design as the project moves forward.

2.2 Objectives of the new woodland

Our objectives for the new woodland are to:

1. Create a mixed productive and resilient woodland that delivers benefits for people, nature and economy by planting appropriate species, suited to the future climate.
2. Enhance biodiversity and improve woodland connectivity in the landscape
3. Provide additional opportunities for informal access to the countryside by creating grassed paths. The site will be registered for Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) access in the future
4. Sequester atmospheric carbon, supporting government in achieving net zero emissions targets. The site will be registered with the Woodland Carbon Code in the future
5. Create new wet woodland habitat to support wildlife by slowing and holding water on site, encouraging naturally wetter areas to develop, and planting suitable native species that thrive in these conditions.

2.3 Early Engagement

Ahead of the public consultation, and to help shape our initial woodland proposals, we engaged with immediate neighbours to the site as well as a small group of additional stakeholders. This included:

- Mel Stride, MP for Central Devon
- Local councillors at Devon County Council and West Devon Borough Council
- Parish councils of Hatherleigh and Meeth
- 21 addresses within 1km of the site plus 1 additional property likely to have views overlooking the new woodland

During January 2026, we contacted this initial group of stakeholders to announce our acquisition, share a map showing the boundary of the new woodland, and invite them to share their thoughts with us through an online survey.

We received a total of five responses: two from elected representatives of West Devon Borough Council and Devon County Council; and the other three from local people living close to the new woodland. The primary topics highlighted in this feedback were around public access and potential parking and traffic problems.

Appendix A sets out how our designs have been shaped by this feedback and addresses some of the key issues raised. Feedback to this early engagement survey, together with further design and survey work, and engagement with other specific stakeholders such as Natural England and Forest Research, helped to shape the design proposals we shared during the public consultation.

2.4 Consultation purpose

The public consultation took place between Monday 6 July and Sunday 2 August 2026. Its aims were to:

1. Provide the public and our other stakeholders with sufficient information about our proposals to allow them to give informed responses and suggestions
2. Understand the reasons for any issues or concerns about our proposals
3. Identify any issues we might not already be aware of
4. Provide adequate time for people to respond
5. Consider all responses carefully ahead of making any changes to our proposals

2.5 Who we consulted

Our consultation was open to anyone with an interest in our proposals, supported by communication targeted at people living and working close to Fishleigh Wood. Feedback was collected through an online survey, which was shared directly with:

- Immediate neighbours who had responded to our early engagement and told us they would like to receive further communications about Fishleigh Wood
- Local elected officials, including the MP for Central Devon
- Statutory stakeholders we consult with when creating a new woodland, including Natural England
- Environmental stakeholders including the RSPB and Devon Wildlife Trust

The full list of stakeholders we contacted is included in **Appendix E**.

2.6 What we asked

The consultation survey included one open question inviting written feedback or questions about our proposed plans for Fishleigh Wood.

We also asked respondents to give their name and email address and, where applicable, supply details of the organisation on whose behalf they were responding.

The survey we published on the website is included in **Appendix C**.

2.7 Methods of responding

People were able to respond to the consultation by:

- Completing the survey hosted online at <https://consult.forestryengland.uk/forest-districts/fishleigh>
- Giving comments by email to woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk

2.8 Consultation materials and publicity

2.8.1 Consultation materials

We published consultation information about the new woodland on our consultation website, Citizen Space: <https://consult.forestryengland.uk/forest-districts/fishleigh> This included:

- An overview of Fishleigh Wood
- A site appraisal, with photographs and maps to give context
- An overview of the surveys undertaken
- Our project objectives, which informed our design proposals
- An overview of tree species we plan to plant
- Visuals of how the new woodland might look after planting
- Information on how to respond to the consultation

2.8.2 Consultation activity

We publicised the consultation in the following ways:

- **Media release:** distributed to regional press contacts
- **Dedicated webpage:** <https://www.forestryengland.uk/woodland-creation/fishleigh-wood>
- **Citizen Space consultation portal:** <https://consult.forestryengland.uk/forest-districts/fishleigh>
- **Emails:** to local residents who responded to early engagement and asked to be kept informed and other stakeholders (see **Appendix D**)
- **Posters:** a poster publicising the consultation was shared locally. It was also sent to local parish councils for inclusion on their noticeboards and websites

3. Consultation feedback

3.1 Overview of responses

We received 22 individual responses to the public consultation for Fishleigh. Seven were from local residents; one was from a parish council; five were from stakeholder organisations; and the remainder from other interested parties.

The stakeholder organisations who responded were:

- Butterfly Conservation
- Devon Countryside Access Forum
- National Grid
- Historic England
- Devon Bat Conservation & Research Group

Three of the consultation responses made no comment. The others included general support for the new woodland, suggestions, and specific concerns, which are detailed below.

We also received a response from Natural England outside of the consultation period. This feedback has impacted the final design of Fishleigh Wood, and a summary of this communication is provided in Section 3.5 of this report. Our responses to specific comments raised from Natural England are also included in Section 4 of this report. However, the feedback is not included in the summaries or graph below, as it was received after the consultation had ended.

3.2 Consultation response by theme

The responses to the consultation have been categorised into the following themes:

- Supportive comments
- Woodland design and tree species
- Public access and recreation
- Wildlife and habitat
- Land use

Within each theme, responses were then categorised into concerns or questions.

3.3 Supportive comments

General supportive comments for Fishleigh Wood included:

- Butterfly Conservation keen to support the woodland and any further support for the nearby Wood White butterfly population
- Devon Countryside Access Forum welcomes new, low-key recreation opportunities and future CRoW dedication
- A local resident expressing strong support, saying “the proposals are very positive and have the potential to create a fantastic long-term asset for Hatherleigh”, and another saying “I am 100 percent behind the initiative and I am very excited to visit once the plan has come to fruition”.

3.4 Concerns and questions

Key questions and concerns raised during public consultation were as follows:

Woodland design and tree species

- Concern from four residents about planting non-native and conifer tree species.
- Concern from a resident about the planting of non-native species in respect of future timber demand.
- Concern from a local woodland owner about squirrel management.

Public access and recreation

- Requests from a resident for cycling trails and additional footpaths and from Devon Countryside Access Forum to create more inclusive trails for cyclists, horse riders, wheelchairs, and mobility scooters.
- Request from Devon Countryside Access Forum and a local resident for a car park.

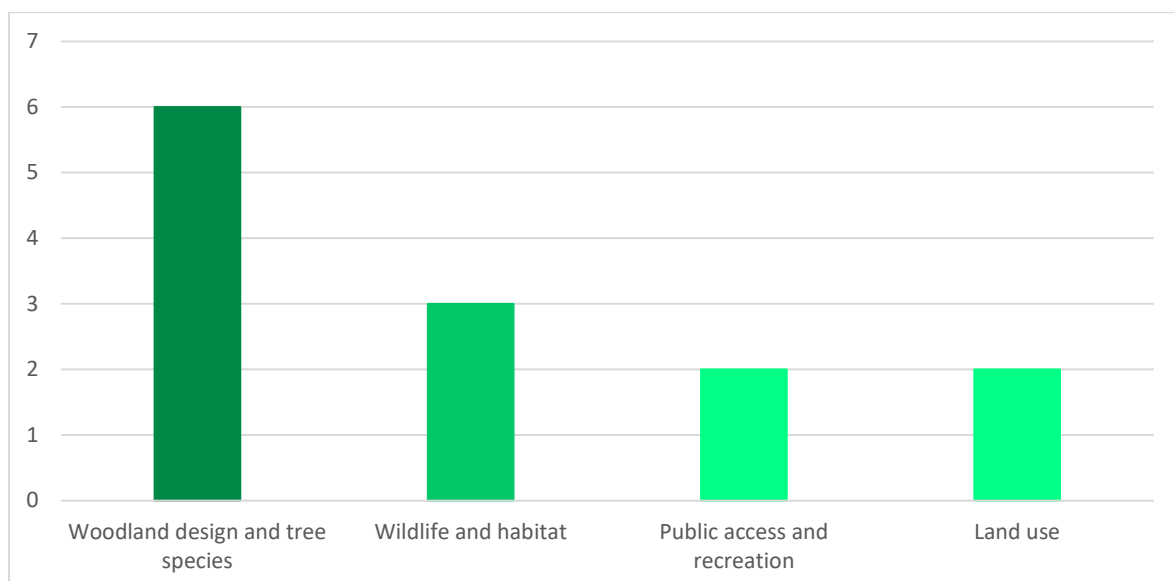
Wildlife and habitat

- Suggestion from Butterfly Conservation to increase the range of the nearby population of Wood White butterfly via wide, sunny rides with scalloped edges, carefully planned rotational ride management, and encouragement/planting of larval foodplants.
- Question from a resident about whether similar wildlife benefits could be achieved by hedgerow restoration without afforesting agricultural land.

Land use

- Concern from a resident about loss of agricultural land.
- Question from an interested party about creating an agroforestry demonstration area within the design.

Comments by theme



3.5 Stakeholder responses

Of the five stakeholder organisations who responded to the consultation, three provided comments. These are summarised below:

Natural England

- Summarises Fishleigh Wood as “a well-designed scheme that provides multiple benefits”.
- Emphasises the importance of open-grown mature and semi-mature trees and hedgerows.
- Advocates for the inclusion of more open space in the design, particularly along the banks of the Torridge, around existing mature in-field trees, and with consideration for wetland features in the flood plain.
- Suggests that proposed infill planting to existing woodland is amended to natural colonisation.
- Encourages more scrub as edge transitions to benefit birds and invertebrates.

Butterfly Conservation

- Supports the proposal and highlights the presence of populations of Wood White butterfly 1km to the east of Fishleigh Wood and at Meeth Quarry, 2km to the north.
- Advises that Fishleigh Wood could support and extend the range of this population with targeted management, including:
 - wide, sunny rides with scalloped edges;
 - carefully planned rotational ride management;
 - encouragement and/or planting of a range of vetches, which are the larval foodplants of the Wood White.
- Offers to support this work with further information.

Devon Countryside Access Forum

- Supports the proposal, particularly the commitment to dedicating Fishleigh Wood under the CRow Act.
- Urges the design of the proposed grass tracks to ensure gates and access points are compliant with British Standard 5709 2018: Gaps, gates and stiles, to meet the needs of mobility scooter users.
- Raises concern that the design does not include access for cyclists, horse riders, wheelchair users, and mobility scooter users, who are not catered for elsewhere in the area.
- Requests clarity about which surfaced tracks are accessible to these users.
- Recommends that the creation of a car park be reconsidered to facilitate access and mitigate traffic impact.

4. Our responses to issues raised

We have considered all the feedback we received to the consultation, and our responses to the key issues raised are set out on the following pages.

We have grouped the issues into broad themes for a more readily understood overview.

4.1 Woodland design and tree species

Concern from four residents about planting non-native and conifer tree species.

Fishleigh Wood will include a mix of broadleaf and conifer tree species, chosen to reflect our changing climate and to help ensure the new woodland will sequester carbon and survive in a drier climate. Many native tree species are expected to struggle under predicted future climates. Including non-native and near-native species is essential to create a resilient forest for the future, provide a sustainable source of timber, and create rich wildlife habitats. Specific species we plan to plant at Fishleigh Wood include western red cedar, Douglas fir, Macedonian pine, hornbeam, blackthorn, common alder, aspen, black poplar, and willow. This variety will help to increase the variety of habitats for wildlife as well as adding amenity value. The full species list is submitted as part of the regulatory process.

Concern from a resident about the planting of non-native species in respect of future timber demand.

Timber production is one of the key objectives for Fishleigh Wood. Demand for timber is increasing and the UK currently imports around 80% of its timber products. Despite the need for road haulage, extending our capacity to produce home grown timber will help to reduce our reliance on overseas imports and improve our home timber security. Although encouraging more sawmills in the South West is beyond the scope of this project, expanding productive woodland cover in the region is one of the key factors that is likely to support new sawmills to start operating.

Concern from a local woodland owner about squirrel management.

Forestry England takes a nation-wide approach to invasive grey squirrel management, focused on protecting existing populations of our endangered native red squirrel. In the South West, our priority is natural control, by supporting the return of pine marten to Devon and Somerset through the Two Moors Pine Marten project. Animals released on Dartmoor and Exmoor have bred successfully and we will monitor the impact on grey squirrel as the populations grow and disperse.

Concern from Natural England about protection of existing mature trees.

We understand the importance of protecting the scattered open grown and hedgerow trees as they are key landscape and ecological features of the site. Mature trees will be managed in accordance with Forestry England's established

woodland management guidance and forestry best practice. In future we will endeavour to send more detailed plans and a design report detailing steps we have taken to preserve site features.

Suggestion from Natural England to include open space in the design, particularly along the banks of the Torridge, around existing mature in-field trees, and with consideration for wetland features in the flood plain.

We are happy to remove the riparian planting currently shown on our plan, and leave the area as open space, accepting any natural colonisation which may occur. The removal of the proposed riparian planting above, will result in the planned fencing and any tree shelters being moved further away from the banks of the River Torridge.

Suggestion from Natural England that proposed infill planting to existing woodland is amended to natural colonisation.

We are happy to remove the proposed planting of the small areas within the plan in the existing woodland, and manage this for natural colonisation. To help this process, we would want to include small groups (2.4m x 2.4m) of dense planting of native broadleaves, widely scattered over the area to assist with future colonisation. Each small area would be a minimum of 12m apart, and natural colonisation between them would be accepted.

Suggestion from Natural England to include more scrub as edge transitions to benefit birds and invertebrates.

We have added additional scrub areas where appropriate, to the edges of our proposed planting areas to improve the staggered edges.

4.2 Public access and recreation

Requests from a resident for cycling trails and additional footpaths and from Devon Countryside Access Forum to create more inclusive trails for cyclists, horse riders, wheelchairs, and mobility scooters.

We understand how important it is to residents to have access to a variety of outdoor spaces and activities, that are inclusive of a wide range of needs and interests. Our funding for Fishleigh Wood comes from the government's Trees Programme, which does not cover the cost of additional recreation infrastructure, such as surfaced trails. Unfortunately, this means that we are not able to provide dedicated recreation routes at this time. While the grass tracks in Fishleigh Wood are intended for walkers only, when the woodland is established and dedicated under the CRow Act in the future, all visitors will be welcome to use the surfaced forest roads and tracks. For visitors seeking surfaced or activity-specific trails, we provide walking, cycling, and horse riding trails at other Forestry England woodlands where funding allows. Facilities can be searched at <https://www.forestryengland.uk/activities-and-wellbeing>

Request from Devon Countryside Access Forum and a local resident for a car park.

While we strive to make our woodlands as accessible as possible, we are not always able to provide everything at every woodland. We recognise the importance of parking availability, particularly for people with limited mobility or time, but our funding for this project unfortunately does not cover the cost of building or maintaining a car park. While we want as many people from the local community as possible to benefit from Fishleigh Wood, we understand that a lack of parking facilities will make it harder for some people to visit. For those who would like to visit a Forestry England woodland by car, Abbeyford Woods is eight miles away and offers parking, a picnic area, and walking trails. We would encourage visitors with limited mobility who are travelling by car to make use of those facilities or others, which can be found at <https://www.forestryengland.uk/visit>.

4.3 Wildlife and habitat

Suggestion to increase the range of the nearby population of Wood White butterfly.

Wood White populations in England are most commonly associated with sunny woodland rides and glades, and thrive in a mosaic of tall grass, herbaceous plants (notably vetches/vetchlings/trefoils), and low scrub habitats. The design of Fishleigh Wood will help restore and create these habitats, suitable for supporting expansion of populations known to be within the wider area. Under Forestry England's UK Woodland Assurance Scheme-certified management, these habitats will be managed through cutting/mowing regimes and we will look to work with local partners, such as Butterfly Conservation, to maximise Wood White opportunities.

Question about achieving similar wildlife benefits by hedgerow restoration without afforesting agricultural land.

In line with government targets to reverse biodiversity loss, it is critical to restore and reconnect diverse and resilient habitat types with structural variety. This is most effectively done at scale to combat historic deforestation, degradation, and fragmentation. By targeting lower-quality, less productive agricultural land of very limited ecological value, Fishleigh Wood is an important opportunity to diversify habitat structure, increase species-richness, and ecosystem functioning. The same outcomes could not be achieved by targeting single habitat types, such as hedgerows. Most wildlife species have very complex lifecycles that require a variety of habitat types, species, and structures to support long-term population stability. The design of Fishleigh Woods has been informed by specialist survey and expertise to include a diversity of species, types, and planting densities to support biodiversity and maximise wildlife benefits, which complement the higher value woodland and hedgerow networks.

4.4 Land use

Concern about loss of agricultural land.

Forestry England is creating new woodlands which will capture carbon, restore and connect habitats, enhance biodiversity, supply sustainable homegrown timber, and provide places for people to enjoy. Each site is carefully assessed for its suitability for woodland creation and sensitivity in the local landscape. This assessment considers the existing land use. We understand concerns around food security and keeping the best land in agricultural production, which is why we target lower-quality or less productive land to create new woodlands. The land at Fishleigh Wood is agricultural land classification grade 3 and 4, and is not considered the best and most versatile agricultural land for food production. Fishleigh Wood will contribute to Forestry England's commitment to increase tree planting across the country, reduce dependence on timber imports, and support the climate emergency.

Question about creating an agroforestry demonstration area within the design.

The objectives of Fishleigh Wood focus on timber production, biodiversity enhancement, habitat for wildlife, and informal public access. Our design aims to establish a predominantly continuous woodland with areas of open space and a network of rides and access routes. While agroforestry can provide a range of land management benefits through the integration of trees and agricultural production, it would require a different management approach which would not align with the objectives of this site, so is not an element that we plan to introduce into our proposals for Fishleigh Wood.

Appendices

Appendix A: Our response to key themes from early engagement

In January 2026, we invited local people to share their initial views about our plans to create a new woodland in Devon. We've set out our responses to this feedback below:

1. Public access

In time, Fishleigh Wood will be fully open to the public and provide a quiet space for local people to enjoy and connect with nature. Once planting is complete and the new woodland is established, we will dedicate the site under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, which will give everyone the legal right to access the woodland on foot, using unsurfaced grass routes through the trees. To give the new trees their best possible start, this will likely be 10-15 years away, although we will confirm this as our plans develop.

There are existing public footpaths running through Fishleigh Wood, including a section of the popular Tarka Trail. These footpaths will remain accessible at all times, and visitors will be able to use them to see the new woodland taking shape before CROW access is available. Residents of Hatherleigh will be able to use these existing public footpaths to visit the new woodland by walking from the town. We are also planning to create an additional section of surfaced forest track to help our staff and contractors manage the new woodland. This will be primarily for operational use, but it will also be available for local people to access.

The new woodland has been designed primarily for local people to enjoy, and we have no plans to create a public car park, visitor amenities, or surfaced trails specifically for recreational use. Our existing woodland at Abbeyford Woods is a short distance away, and Fishleigh Wood is not being created to replicate or replace what is on offer there. Our primary goal for Fishleigh Wood is to establish a resilient new woodland that benefits wildlife and the climate, while creating a future source of sustainable timber.

Unfortunately, horse riders and cyclists will not be permitted to use the grass routes through the trees at Fishleigh Wood. This is because horse hooves and cycle tyres could disturb or damage the sensitive soils and habitats we need to protect, particularly when the trees are still young. Horse riders and cyclists will be able to use the new and existing surfaced forest tracks at Fishleigh Wood, although these will be limited in length and quantity. Cycling and horse-riding facilities are provided at other Forestry England woodlands. One example is Harcombe, part of Haldon Forest, which you can learn more about here: www.forestryengland.uk/Harcombe

Visitors will be welcome to walk their dogs in the new woodland, provided they keep their pets in sight and close by at all times, in line with our forest dog code.

2. Traffic and parking

We want to avoid a significant increase to car traffic on local roads and inconsiderate parking that may cause problems for neighbouring properties. The new woodland has been

designed primarily for local people to enjoy, which is why we are not planning to create a public car park. We also have no plans to include visitor or other recreational facilities, including signage that might direct visitors to the new woodland.

The new woodland is less than eight miles away from our existing woodland Abbeyford Woods, which provides parking, a picnic area, and walking trails. Equally, Meeth Quarry Nature Reserve, managed by Devon Wildlife Trust, is less than five miles away and also offers parking facilities, as well as accessible trails, bird hides, and toilets. We anticipate that those who wish to visit a natural space in this part of Devon by car will choose to visit one of these locations over Fishleigh Wood. However, if inconsiderate parking does become an issue, we will explore how this can be discouraged.

Our staff and contractor vehicles need to access the new woodland so that we can manage and maintain the site. Within the new woodland, we will also be creating a new network of forest roads to help minimise traffic near Hatherleigh.

In time, this woodland will provide a sustainable source of timber. However, it will be about 20 years before any timber is harvested from the site, and transport routes will be agreed with the local highways authority as required.

3. Tree species

We have more than a century of experience and the latest scientific evidence to help us carefully plan the trees we will plant within Fishleigh Wood. Detailed surveys have been carried out to help us choose the species that are well suited to the site, both now and as the climate changes. Our local foresters have considered a wide range of factors, including the soil quality and how quickly the trees will grow, as well as the important habitat, species, and geographical features within the area. We also take account of tree pests and diseases to help keep the woodland resilient and healthy over the long term.

The new woodland will include a mix of broadleaf and conifer tree species, with groups of shrubs planted around the edges of the site, including along the Tarka Trail. This helps to increase the variety of habitats for wildlife and adds seasonal colour and texture to the landscape. Specific species we are planning to plant at Fishleigh Wood include western red cedar, Douglas fir, Macedonian pine, hornbeam, and blackthorn. These species have been chosen to provide a range of benefits for wildlife while also contributing to the UK's sustainable timber industry once the woodland is established. Towards the River Torridge and in areas of the site that could become waterlogged, we will be planting wet woodland tree species such as common alder, aspen, black poplar, and willow.

We will ensure the new woodland will visually complement established woodlands in the area, and we also protect the mature trees already on the site, leaving appropriate space around them to safeguard their roots and ensure they can continue to thrive. Towards the southeast of the new woodland, there is a small section of existing ancient woodland. Open spaces will be left around this area to help support natural regeneration of these important native tree species. Existing hedgerows will also be protected, which are species rich and could provide important habitat for the hazel dormouse, a protected species in the UK, as well as nesting and foraging birds.

4. Wildlife

Creating a new woodland in this area will increase biodiversity by restoring varied habitats that are beneficial for wildlife. As part of our planning, we carried out surveys to tell us more about the plants and wildlife in the area, and these surveys have guided our draft designs. We're planning to create open spaces and to leave wide gaps between trees, creating a diverse environment that will benefit species including the hazel dormouse, a wide variety of common amphibians and insects, woodland birds, and plants including the bluebell and early purple orchid. The new woodland will also provide important roosting opportunities for bats in the area, including the barbastelle, which is one of the rarest species of bat in the UK.

The wet woodland area of Fishleigh Wood will also provide important habitat for otters, with planting helping to reconnect natural corridors. It will also support wet woodland bird species such as the lesser spotted woodpecker, cuckoo, spotted flycatcher, marsh tit, and willow tit.

The woodland will also provide additional benefits along the River Torridge. Over time, the trees will help reduce erosion and sedimentation. This is likely to help improve water quality and could reduce flood-risk downstream.

5. Community engagement

We may host a community planting day when we begin planting the new woodland, depending on available resources. If we're able to facilitate this, we will advertise the opportunity locally. We're also in the process of setting up a small volunteering group in this part of Devon, which local people will be able to get involved in.

We will continue to engage with and inform local communities as our plans for Fishleigh Wood progress. We will also be ensuring our webpage for the new woodland is kept up to date: www.forestryengland.uk/woodland-creation/fishleigh-wood

Appendix B: Consultation information

Information panels

Displayed at the public consultation event and available to view on the consultation website [here](#).



Forestry England is planting new woodlands to expand the nation's forests

We are working on designs for a new woodland, Fishleigh Wood, near Hatherleigh, Devon. We would like your comments on our initial proposals. Your feedback will inform our final designs for the woodland.

We're working across England to expand the nation's forests, planting new, resilient woodlands that will stand for generations to come. Since 2021, we've created nearly 2,000 hectares of new woodland, and we're now committed to creating another 5,000 hectares by 2031.

Every new woodland will be a valuable place for wildlife, often linking other woods and hedgerows to provide green corridors for wildlife to move and thrive across the landscape.

In time, each new woodland will provide sustainable timber, contributing to the rural economy. And they'll have wider environmental benefits including absorbing carbon, improving soil health and air quality, and water management.

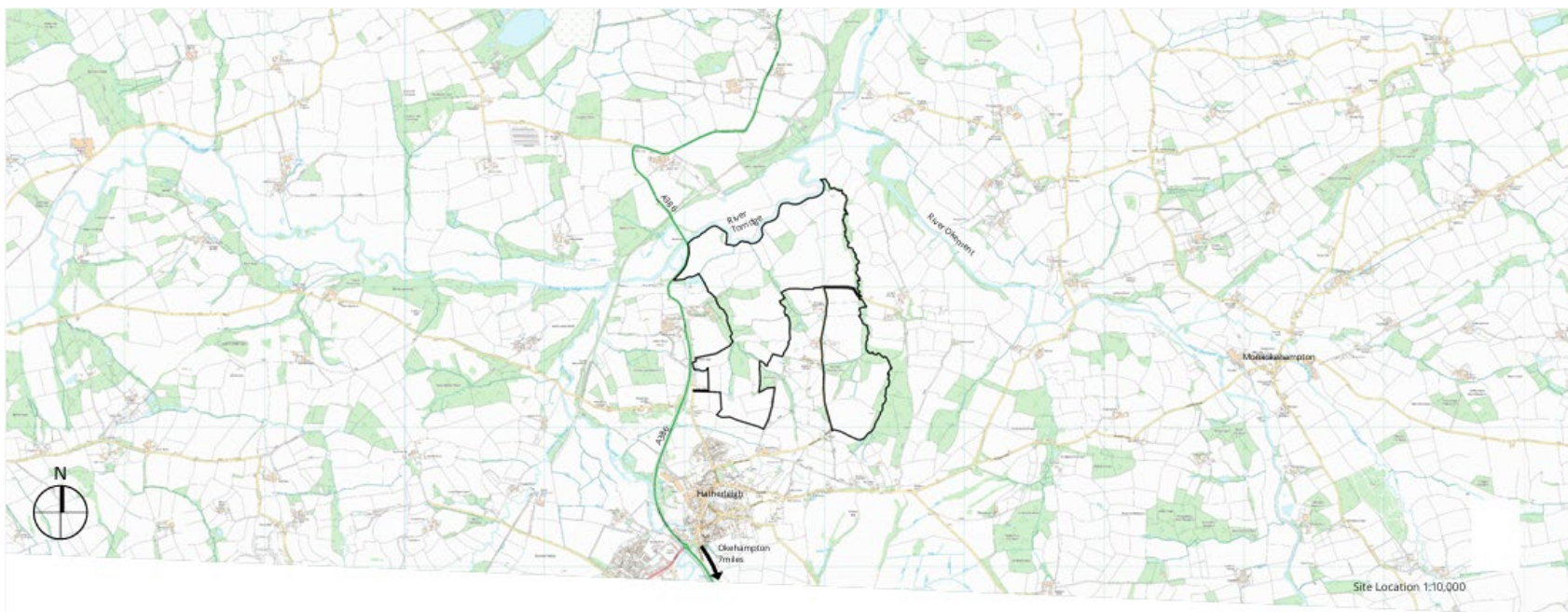
The new woodlands will have public access so you can explore and enjoy them to support your health and wellbeing.

Forestry England is creating these woodlands through DEFRA's (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) Trees Programme.

Scan the QR code
to find out more:

forestryengland.uk





Site location & context

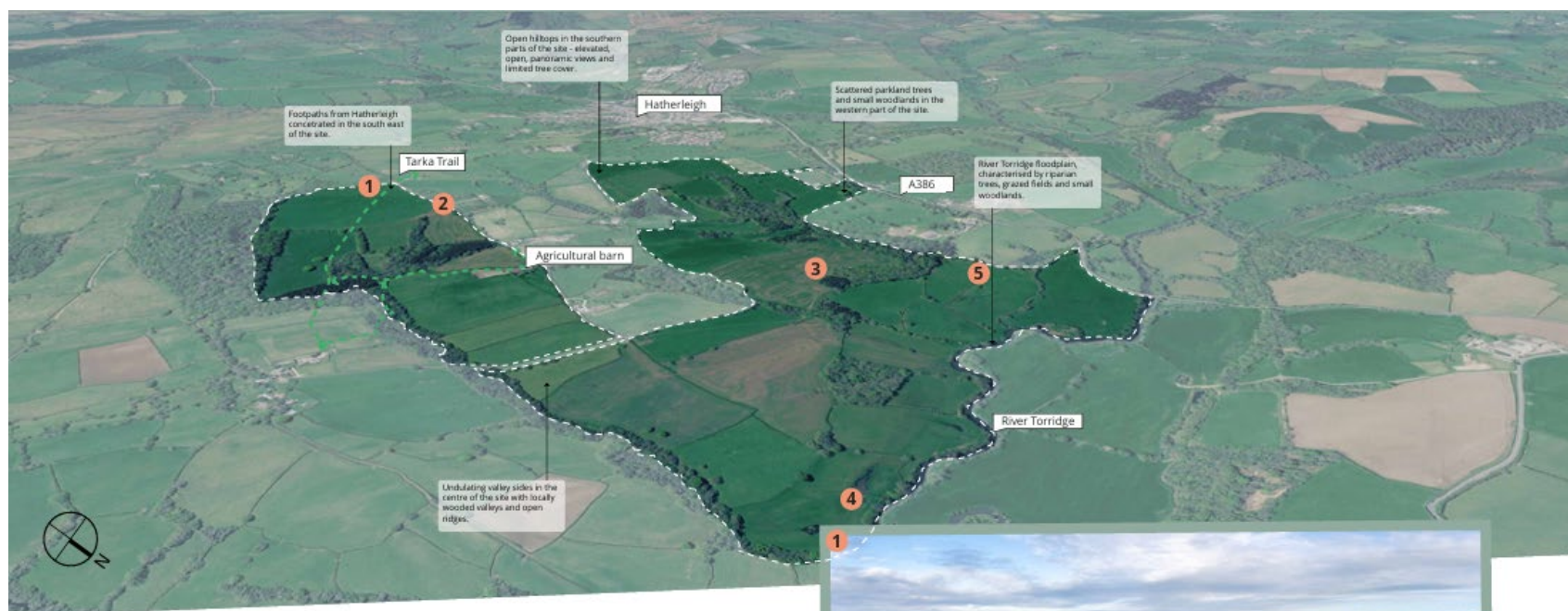
The site is located to the north of Hatherleigh and 7 miles north west of Okehampton in West Devon, between the A368 and the River Torridge. The northern edge of Dartmoor National Park lies approximately 8 miles to the south.

At a national level, the site is wholly within Natural England's National Character Area 149: The Culm. We look carefully at the character of the landscape when designing woodlands.

The Culm is described as a landscape of 'rolling ridges and plateaux. The open, often treeless, ridges are separated by an intricate pattern of small valleys forming the catchments of the Rivers Taw, Torridge and Mole. This is largely a remote and sparsely populated landscape.'

The pattern and scale in the wider landscape starts to inform where and how we plant the woodland within the site itself so that it fits in with its surroundings.





The existing site

The 135-hectare site consists of mostly pastoral (grazed) fields with some areas of existing woodland. The River Torridge borders the northern edge from which the site rises southwards towards Hatherleigh Moor.

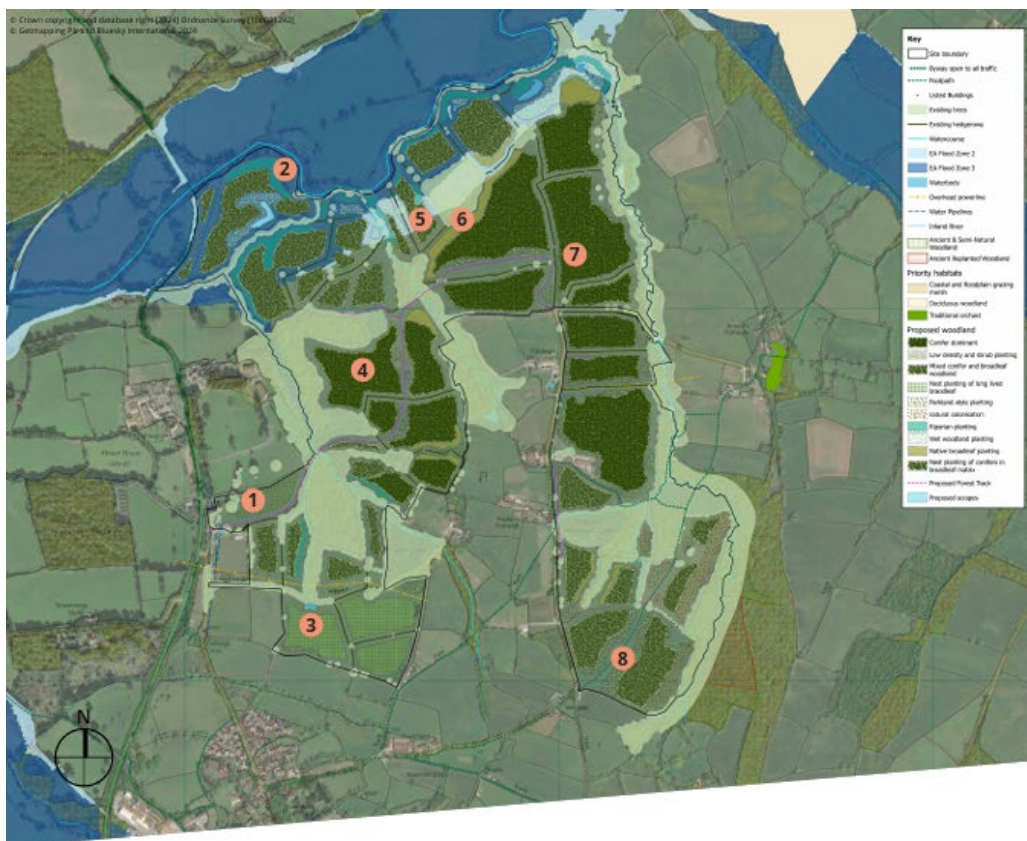
The topography of the site is undulating, rising from 55m above sea level in the north to 135m above sea level at the southern end of the site. There are narrow valleys of small streams that flow into the River Torridge. The small to medium sized fields are bounded mostly by hedgerows.

The existing woodland within the site is a mix of broadleaved, coniferous and mixed woodland. Generally this woodland organically follows the streams towards the floodplain and the river. There is some ancient woodland within and around the site that will be protected.

Understanding the landscape and features within the site helps to inform the woodland design.

Photos: 1. View north from the southwest corner of the site. 2. View south towards existing mixed woodland within the site. 3. View north from a field boundary in the west of the site. 4. View of seasonal pond within the floodplain. 5. View across fields in the floodplain to the west of the site.





Tree species we could plant



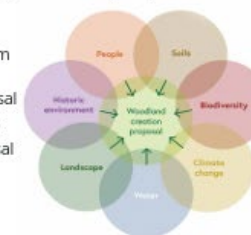
Draft design

How we design new woodland

We are designing the new woodland to benefit people, the economy, climate, wildlife and the wider landscape. Our design meets the UK Forestry Standard, which takes into account the following elements (Forestry Commission, 2021):

Detailed desktop surveys, site surveys and analysis will inform our design. This includes:

- Preliminary ecological appraisal
- Historic environment records
- Landscape and visual appraisal
- Local environment records
- Soil mapping
- Ecological site classification
- Utilities searches
- Responses to initial consultation



Objectives for the new woodland



Establish a productive, mixed resilient woodland: plant a mixed species woodland that delivers benefits for people, nature and the economy by planting appropriate species, suited to the future climate, to produce a lasting supply of certified sustainable timber.



Enhance biodiversity and improve woodland connectivity: link existing woodlands to improve habitat connectivity. Enhance hedges, waterways and create open spaces within the woodland for wildlife to thrive.



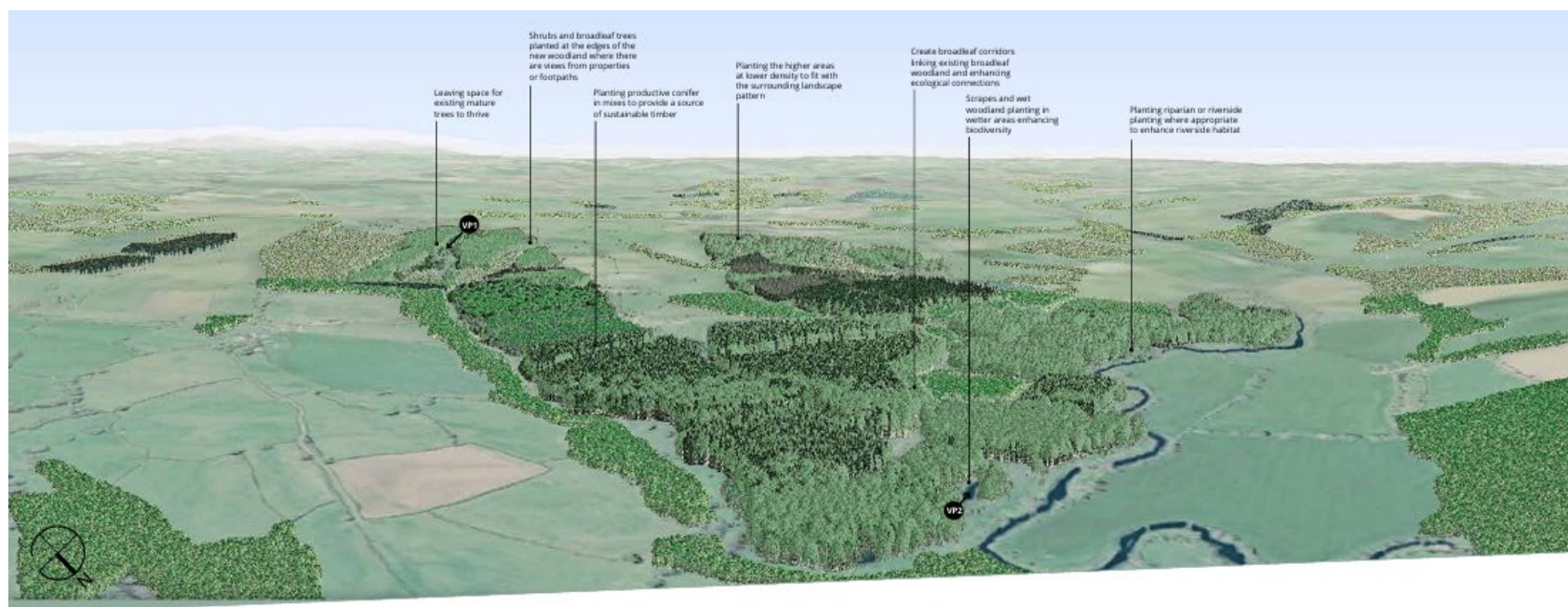
Opportunity to create new wet woodland habitat to support wildlife by slowing and holding water on site, encouraging naturally wetter areas to develop, and planting suitable native species that thrive in these conditions.



Sequester atmospheric carbon: help meet government net zero emissions goals by planting fast-growing conifers in diverse, complementary mixtures with native species, and providing resilient woodland management options in the future in addition to storing carbon.



Public access for health and wellbeing: provide low-key recreation opportunities by improving access to the countryside for local residents and visitors.



How the new woodland could look

Our initial designs include proposals to:

- Focus our broadleaf tree planting along corridors and in places that will connect existing broadleaf woodland in and around the site.
- Plant riparian (riverside) woodland along the River Torridge and its tributaries, leaving some areas of open space to create a diverse riverside habitat.
- Create and retain scrapes (shallow ponds) and plant wet woodland tree species such as alder and willow in identified wetter areas of the site.
- Leave areas of open space around existing mature trees and hedgerows.
- Enhance the surrounding Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland by leaving a wide 50m buffer for natural colonisation.
- Use shrubs and broadleaves along tracks and trails to create interesting views and wildlife corridors.
- Blend the edges of the most visible woodland blocks by having gradual transitions from broadleaf or shrub planting into conifer planting.

Artist's impressions:

Viewpoint 1 How it looks now



How it could look after 10 years



How it could look in 50 years



Viewpoint 2 How it looks now



How it could look after 10 years



How it could look in 50 years





**Your views are important to us -
let us know what you think**



Forestry England

Your views are important to us - let us know what you think

Responding to this consultation

We encourage you to submit your response online. You can view our plans and submit your views by completing the online feedback form at:

- <https://bit.ly/fishleigh>
- If you are unable to do this, you can respond via email at woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk

All views should be received by midnight on Sunday 2 August 2026

What's next?

- Review of consultation feedback and additional surveys
- Further design work to refine our proposals
- Application to the Forestry Commission for permission to create the new woodland
- Initial planting (Winter 2027/28)

**Scan the QR code
to find out more:**

forestryengland.uk





Forestry England

A new woodland at Fishleigh - our response to key themes from early engagement

In January 2026, we invited local people to share their initial views about our plans to create a new woodland near Hatherleigh in Devon. We are grateful to everyone who got involved, as this initial feedback has helped shape our initial design plans. We've set out our responses to questions raised during this process below: We've set out our responses to this feedback below:

Public access

In time, Fishleigh Wood will be fully open to the public and provide a quiet space for local people to enjoy and connect with nature. Once planting is complete and the new woodland is established, we will dedicate the site under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, which will give everyone the legal right to access the woodland on foot, using unsurfaced grass routes through the trees. To give the new trees their best possible start, this will likely be 10-15 years away, although we will confirm this as our plans develop.

There are existing public footpaths running through Fishleigh Wood, including a section of the popular Tarka Trail. These footpaths will remain accessible at all times, and visitors will be able to use them to see the new woodland taking shape before CROW access is available. Residents of Hatherleigh will be able to use these existing public footpaths to visit the new woodland by walking from the town. We are also planning to create an additional section of surfaced forest track to help our staff and contractors manage the new woodland. This will be primarily for operational use, but it will also be available for local people to access.

The new woodland has been designed primarily for local people to enjoy, and we have no plans to create a public car park, visitor amenities, or surfaced trails specifically for recreational use. Our existing woodland at Abbeyford Woods is a short distance away, and Fishleigh Wood is not being created to replicate or replace what is on offer there. Our primary goal for Fishleigh Wood is to establish a resilient new woodland that benefits wildlife and the climate, while creating a future source of sustainable timber.

Unfortunately, horse riders and cyclists will not be permitted to use the grass routes through the trees at Fishleigh Wood. This is because horse hooves and cycle tyres could disturb or damage the sensitive soils and habitats we need to protect, particularly when the trees are still young. Horse riders and cyclists will be able to use the new and existing surfaced forest tracks at Fishleigh Wood, although these will be limited in length and quantity. Cycling and horse-riding facilities are provided at other Forestry England woodlands. One example is Harcombe, part of Haldon Forest, which you can learn more about here: www.forestryengland.uk/harcombe

Visitors will be welcome to walk their dogs in the new woodland, provided they keep their pets in sight and close by at all times, in line with our forest dog code

Traffic and parking

We want to avoid a significant increase to car traffic on local roads and inconsiderate parking that may cause problems for neighbouring properties. The new woodland has been designed primarily for local people to enjoy, which is why we are not planning to create a public car park. We also have no plans to include visitor or other recreational facilities, including signage that might direct visitors to the new woodland.

The new woodland is less than eight miles away from our existing woodland Abbeyford Woods, which provides parking, a picnic area, and walking trails. Equally, Meeth Quarry Nature Reserve, managed by Devon Wildlife Trust, is less than five miles away and also offers parking facilities, as well as accessible trails, bird hides, and toilets. We anticipate that those who wish to visit a natural space in this part of Devon by car will choose to

visit one of these locations over Fishleigh Wood. However, if inconsiderate parking does become an issue, we will explore how this can be discouraged.

Our staff and contractor vehicles need to access the new woodland so that we can manage and maintain the site. Within the new woodland, we will also be creating a new network of forest roads to help minimise traffic near Hatherleigh.

In time, this woodland will provide a sustainable source of timber. However, it will be about 20 years before any timber is harvested from the site, and transport routes will be agreed with the local highways authority as required.

Tree species

We have more than a century of experience and the latest scientific evidence to help us carefully plan the trees we will plant within Fishleigh Wood. Detailed surveys have been carried out to help us choose the species that are well suited to the site, both now and as the climate changes. Our local foresters have considered a wide range of factors, including the soil quality and how quickly the trees will grow, as well as the important habitat, species, and geographical features within the area. We also take account of tree pests and diseases to help keep the woodland resilient and healthy over the long term.

The new woodland will include a mix of broadleaf and conifer tree species, with groups of shrubs planted around the edges of the site, including along the Tarka Trail. This helps to increase the variety of habitats for wildlife and adds seasonal colour and texture to the landscape. Specific species we are planning to plant at Fishleigh Wood include western red cedar, Douglas fir, Macedonian pine, hornbeam, and blackthorn. These species have been chosen to provide a range of benefits for wildlife while also contributing to the UK's sustainable timber industry once the woodland is established. Towards the River Torridge and in areas of the site that could become waterlogged, we will be planting wet woodland tree species such as common alder, aspen, black poplar, and willow.

We will ensure the new woodland will visually complement established woodlands in the area, and we also protect the mature trees already on the site, leaving appropriate space around them to safeguard their roots and ensure they can continue to thrive. Towards the south east of the new woodland, there is a small section of existing ancient woodland. Open spaces will be left around this area to help support natural regeneration of these important native tree species. Existing hedgerows will also be protected, which are species rich and could provide important habitat for the hazel dormouse, a protected species in the UK, as well as nesting and foraging birds.

Wildlife

Creating a new woodland in this area will increase biodiversity by restoring varied habitats that are beneficial for wildlife. As part of our planning, we carried out surveys to tell us more about the plants and wildlife in the area, and these surveys have guided our draft designs. We're planning to create open spaces and leave wide gaps between trees, creating a diverse environment that will benefit species including the hazel dormouse, a wide variety of common amphibians and insects, woodland birds, and plants including the bluebell and early purple orchid. The new woodland will also provide important roosting opportunities for bats in the area, including the barbastelle, which is one of the rarest

species of bat in the UK.

The wet woodland area of Fishleigh Wood will also provide important habitat for otters, with planting helping to reconnect natural corridors. It will also support wet woodland bird species such as the lesser spotted woodpecker, cuckoo, spotted flycatcher, marsh tit, and willow tit.

The woodland will also provide additional benefits along the River Torridge. Over time, the trees will help reduce erosion and sedimentation. This is likely to help improve water quality and could reduce flood-risk downstream.

Community engagement

We may host a community planting day when we begin planting the new woodland, depending on available resources. If we're able to facilitate this, we will advertise the opportunity locally. We're also in the process of setting up a small volunteering group in this part of Devon, which local people will be able to get involved in.

We will continue to engage with and inform local communities as our plans for Fishleigh Wood progress. We will also be ensuring our webpage for the new woodland is kept up to date: www.forestryengland.uk/woodland-creation/fishleigh-wood

Scan the QR code
to find out more:

forestryengland.uk



Event poster



 **Forestry England**

New Woodland near Hatherleigh

**Join us for a special
community event**

Tuesday 21 July, between 4pm and 7pm
Hatherleigh Community Centre, Bowling
Green Lane, Hatherleigh, EX20 3HB

We're planning to create a new 135-hectare
woodland called Fishleigh Wood near the
town of Hatherleigh.

Join us for a special community drop-in event
on Tuesday 21 July to find out more about
the new woodland and speak to members of
our team. You can also share your views with
us online by scanning the QR code or by
visiting <https://bit.ly/fishleigh>



Questions? Contact us at:
woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk

forestryengland.uk

Press release

Forestry England announces plans for a new woodland in Devon

Forestry England has announced plans to create a new woodland near the town of Hatherleigh, as part of its work to plant more trees across England and create long-lasting benefits for wildlife, people, and the climate.

The new woodland, which will be called Fishleigh Wood, will be created on land recently bought by Forestry England. Over the coming years, the 135-hectare site will be planted with a mix of tree species that will absorb carbon from the atmosphere, enhance the local landscape, and provide important habitat for wildlife. In the future, it will also provide a range of other benefits, including improving water quality along the River Torridge and providing a future source of sustainable timber.

Fishleigh Wood will be the second new woodland Forestry England is creating in the area, following the recent announcement of Okement Wood, near Okehampton, just eight miles away. Together, the two sites will form stepping-stone habitats for wildlife, making it easier for species including birds and mammals to move across the landscape.

Forestry England will be speaking to local communities and stakeholders as plans for Fishleigh Wood develop, and there will be opportunities for the public to share their views later in the year.

Kevin Stannard, Forest Management Director at Forestry England, said:

“Creating this new woodland near Hatherleigh is a positive step forward for woodland habitat in this part of Devon. By planting new woodlands close to one another, as we’re doing here, we can help nature recover at a landscape scale, while delivering long-term benefits for future generations.

We’re at an early stage of the planning process, but we’re excited about the role this new woodland can play for nature and the local community and will be sharing our plans for public feedback in due course.”

This work is being funded by the government’s Nature for Climate Fund programme and is part of Forestry England’s wider work to create new woodlands across England. You can find out more on Forestry England’s website: [New woodland: Fishleigh Wood | Forestry England](#)

Ends

Notes to Editor

1. [Images are available here.](#) Please credit Forestry England/Crown copyright.
2. Forestry England manages and cares for the nation's 1,500 woods and forests, with over 313 million visits in 2024/25. As England's largest land manager, we shape landscapes and enhance forests for people to enjoy, wildlife to flourish and businesses to grow. We are continuing the work we have already started to make the nation's forests resilient to climate change and by 2026 we will:
 - create at least 6,000 more hectares where we integrate wilding activities in our productive forests
 - increase the diversity of visitors to the nation's forests and have one million hours of high-quality volunteer time given to the nation's forests
 - plant at least 2,000 hectares of new, high-quality woodlands

For more information visit forestryengland.uk. Forestry England is an agency of the Forestry Commission.

3. Forestry England is creating this new woodland through the Nature for Climate Fund, a UK government initiative aimed at tackling climate change and boosting biodiversity.

Media contact:

Becky Morris, Marketing and Communications Officer | becky.morris@forestryengland.uk

Forestry England website

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/woodland-creation/fishleigh-wood>



Growing the nation's forests

Fishleigh Wood will cover around 135 hectares and be planted with a mix of carefully selected tree species. Over time, as the trees establish, the new woodland will become a valuable habitat for wildlife and provide a future source of sustainable timber. It will also become an important carbon store, helping to mitigate against the effects of climate change.

This isn't the only new woodland we're creating in this part of Devon. We're also developing [Okeham Wood](#), near Okehampton, just 8 miles away, and [Dury Wood](#), 10 miles away. All three sites are also a short drive away from the popular [Abbeyford Woods](#). Together, these sites will help create a stronger network of woodland cover across the landscape.



We want to hear from you!

A public consultation for Fishleigh Wood is open from Monday 6 July until midnight on Sunday 2 August. We're inviting local communities to view our draft designs and share their thoughts with us. This will help us shape the final decisions for the new woodland.

Our draft designs include an artist's impression of what the site might look like in 25 years, along with our responses to questions about public access, traffic, and the tree species we're planning to plant.

[Have your say »](#)

Wildlife at Fishleigh Wood

Fishleigh Wood is being carefully designed to support a wide range of wildlife. We'll be planting a mix of different tree and shrub species to create different habitats that could support hazel dormice, otters, a wide variety of common amphibians and insects, and woodland birds such as the lesser spotted woodpecker. The woodland will also provide important roosting opportunities for bats, including the barbastelle, which is one of the rarest species of bat in the UK.

[Helping wildlife thrive »](#)



Frequently asked questions

[X Close all](#)

What types of trees will you plant?



When will works start and finish?



How do I stay in touch about the project?



Appendix C: Consultation questionnaire

Forestry Commission

HomeFind ActivitiesWe Asked, You Said, We Did

Search

New woodland - Blackwell

Page 1 of 4

Closes 30 Jan 2026

This service needs [cookies enabled](#)

Introduction

Thank you for taking part in this consultation on the design proposals for a new woodland, Blackwell Wood, near Luxborough in Exmoor National Park, Somerset.

You can submit information without completing the name and email details, but if you choose to do so they will be held by Forestry England as per our privacy policy [Privacy Policy | Forestry England](#)

1. What is your name?

Name

2. What is your address?

3. What is your postcode?

4. Are you responding as:

☐ A local resident

☐ A local business

☐ A elected official

☐ Other stakeholder: Please name below

5. If you're responding on behalf of an organisation, what is the name of your organisation?

6. What is your e-mail address?

7. Would you like to be notified about future consultation on these new woodland proposals?

(Required)

An answer is required

☐ Yes (please make sure you have provided your e-mail address above)

☐ No

Save and come back later...

Continue >

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[Accessibility](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Cookies](#) [Privacy](#) [Help / feedback](#)

29 | Fishleigh Wood | Consultation report and our response to issues raised



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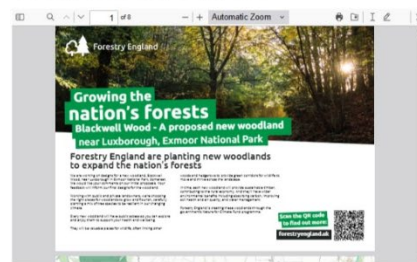
Closes 30 Jan 2026

This service needs [cookies](#) [enabled](#).

Provide your views on a new woodland, Blackwell Wood,
near Luxborough

To view a larger of smaller image : Click + or -

To view as a presentation, save or print the proposals: [Click >>](#)



8. Please use this space to add feedback or questions on the proposed plans.

Type your response here (Required)

[← Back](#)

« First

Save and come back later...

Continued

Appendix D: Examples of letters/emails announcing the consultation

From: Woodland Creation <woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk>
Sent on: Monday, July 6, 2026 7:00:00 AM
To: Woodland Creation <woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk>
BCC:
Subject: Public consultation on draft design proposals for Fishleigh Wood

Dear neighbour,

Thank you for your interest in Fishleigh Wood, the new woodland we are planning to create near Hatherleigh in Devon.

We are contacting you as we have today launched a public consultation on our draft design plans for the new woodland.

These plans will give you an overview of what the new woodland could look like. They have been informed by site surveys, as well as the valuable insights gained from you and other local people earlier this year. They will be available to view and comment on until midnight on Sunday 2 August: <https://consult.forestryengland.uk/forest-districts/fishleigh/>

Fishleigh Wood is one of many new woodlands we're creating across the UK to grow the nation's forests. It will become a valuable habitat for wildlife and an important carbon store. In time, it will also provide a source of sustainable timber and become a new green space for you to explore and enjoy.

Public drop-in event

As part of the consultation, we will be holding a public drop-in event where you can view our design plans in person and talk to members of the Forestry England team. This will be held at **Hatherleigh Community Centre on Tuesday 21 July from 4pm to 7pm**. Please do come along to find out more about the new woodland and ask any questions you may have.

Responding to the consultation

We encourage you to submit your response to this public consultation online. You can view our plans and submit your views here: <https://consult.forestryengland.uk/forest-districts/fishleigh/>

If you are unable to do this, you can respond via email, typing 'Fishleigh Wood Consultation Response' in the subject line of your email and including your name, address, and postcode in your response.

Next steps

The consultation will close at midnight on Sunday 2 August. All responses will then be summarised and included in a consultation report — along with our response to the key issues raised — and published on our website. Consultation feedback and further surveys will help shape the final design proposal we will submit for regulatory review ahead of planting the new woodland.

We will update our website as our plans for the new woodland progress. You can find the latest information here: www.forestryengland.uk/article/new-woodland-fishleigh-wood

We look forward to reading your comments.

Kind regards,

The Woodland Creation Team

Forestry England

Email: woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk

Website: www.forestryengland.uk



Forestry England

Growing the future

From: Woodland Creation <woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk>
Sent on: Monday, July 6, 2026 7:00:00 AM
To: Woodland Creation <woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk>
BCC:
Subject: Public consultation on draft design proposals for Fishleigh Wood
Attachments: Fishleigh poster (2).pdf (2.98 MB)

Good morning,

We recently contacted you about Fishleigh Wood, a new woodland we are planning to create near Hatherleigh in Devon.

We are now writing to let you know that we have launched a public consultation on our draft design plans for the new woodland.

These plans will give you an overview of what the new woodland could look like. They have been informed by site surveys, as well as valuable insights gained from local people earlier this year. They will be available to view and comment **on until midnight on Sunday 2 August:** <https://consult.forestryengland.uk/forest-districts/fishleigh/>

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We have attached a PDF copy of a poster promoting the consultation and drop-in event and would be grateful if you could include this on your website or notice boards where available.

Next steps

The consultation will close at midnight on Sunday 2 August. All responses will then be summarised and included in a consultation report — along with our response to the key issues raised — and published on our website. Consultation feedback and further surveys will help shape the final design proposal we will submit for regulatory review ahead of planting the new woodland.

We will update our website as our plans for the new woodland progress. You can find the latest information here: www.forestryengland.uk/article/new-woodland-fishleigh-wood

We look forward to reading your comments.

Kind regards,

The Woodland Creation Team

Forestry England

Email: woodland.creation@forestryengland.uk

Website: www.forestryengland.uk



Forestry England

Growing the future

Appendix E: Stakeholders contacted

Statutory Stakeholders
Natural England
Environment Agency
Historic England
Elected Representatives
Parliamentary MP for Central Devon, Mel Stride
County Ward Councillor for Hatherleigh
Borough Ward Councillors for Hatherleigh
Parish Councils
Hatherleigh Parish Council
Meeth Parish Council
Wildlife and special interest groups
Devon Wildlife Trust
RSPB
Bat Conservation Trust
Butterfly Conservation
National Farmers Union (NFU)
Devon Bat Conservation & Research Group
Rivers Trust
Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans)
Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)
Devon Countryside Access Forum
Devon CPRE
Sustainable Hatherleigh
Utilities
National Grid
South West Water
BT Openreach
Other
Former owner
Local grazier
Neighbouring businesses
Devon County Council, Historic Environment Manager & County Archaeologist
Devon County Council, roads and transport
Devon County Council, flood department
Devon County Council, ecology
West Devon Borough Council, tree officer
Forestry Commission Nature Recovery Advisor