



Forestry England

Growing the nation's forests

Fishleigh Wood - A proposed new woodland near Hatherleigh, Devon

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.

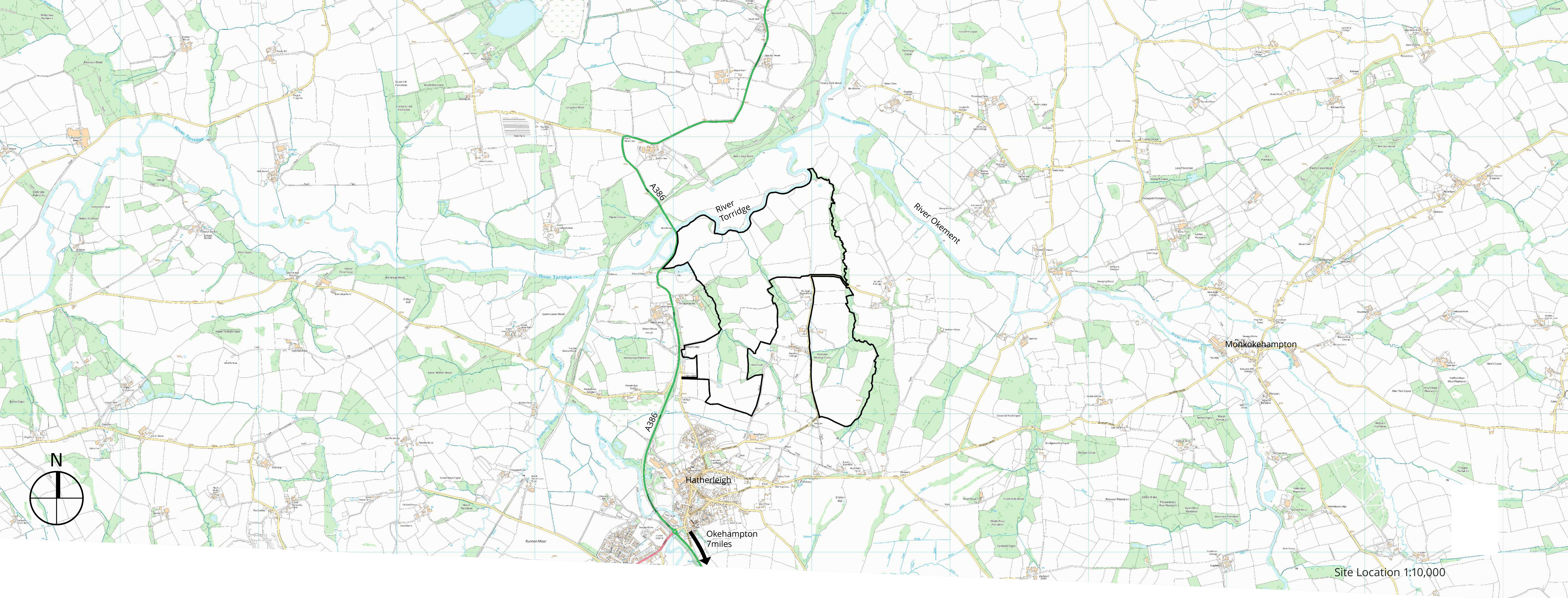
The new woodlands will have public access so you can explore and enjoy them to support your health and wellbeing.

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





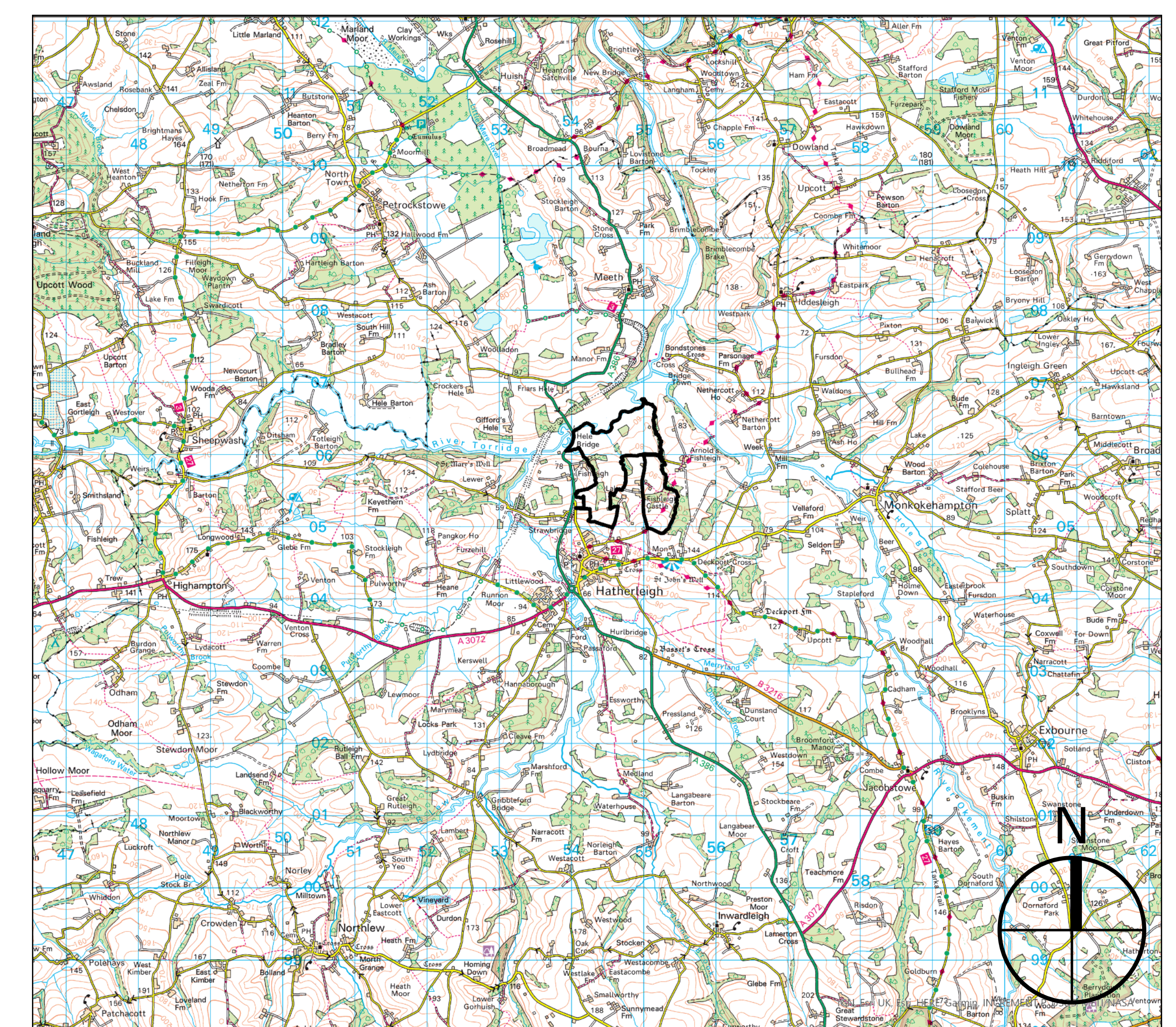
Site location & context

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 8miles 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.

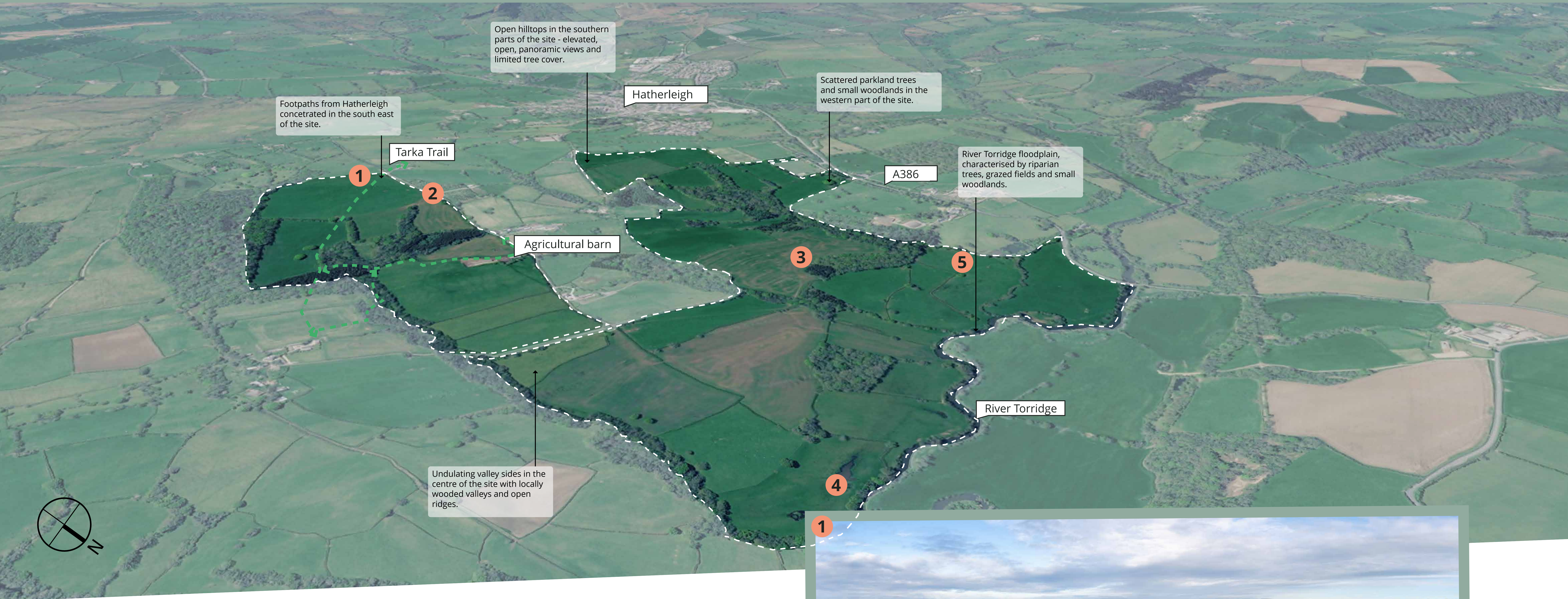
The Culm is described as a landscape of ‘rolling ridges and plateaux. The open, often treeless, ridges are separated by an intricate pattern of small valleys forming the catchments of the Rivers Taw, Torridge and Mole. This is largely a remote and sparsely populated landscape.’

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 it’s surroundings.



Site Location 1:100,000

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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.

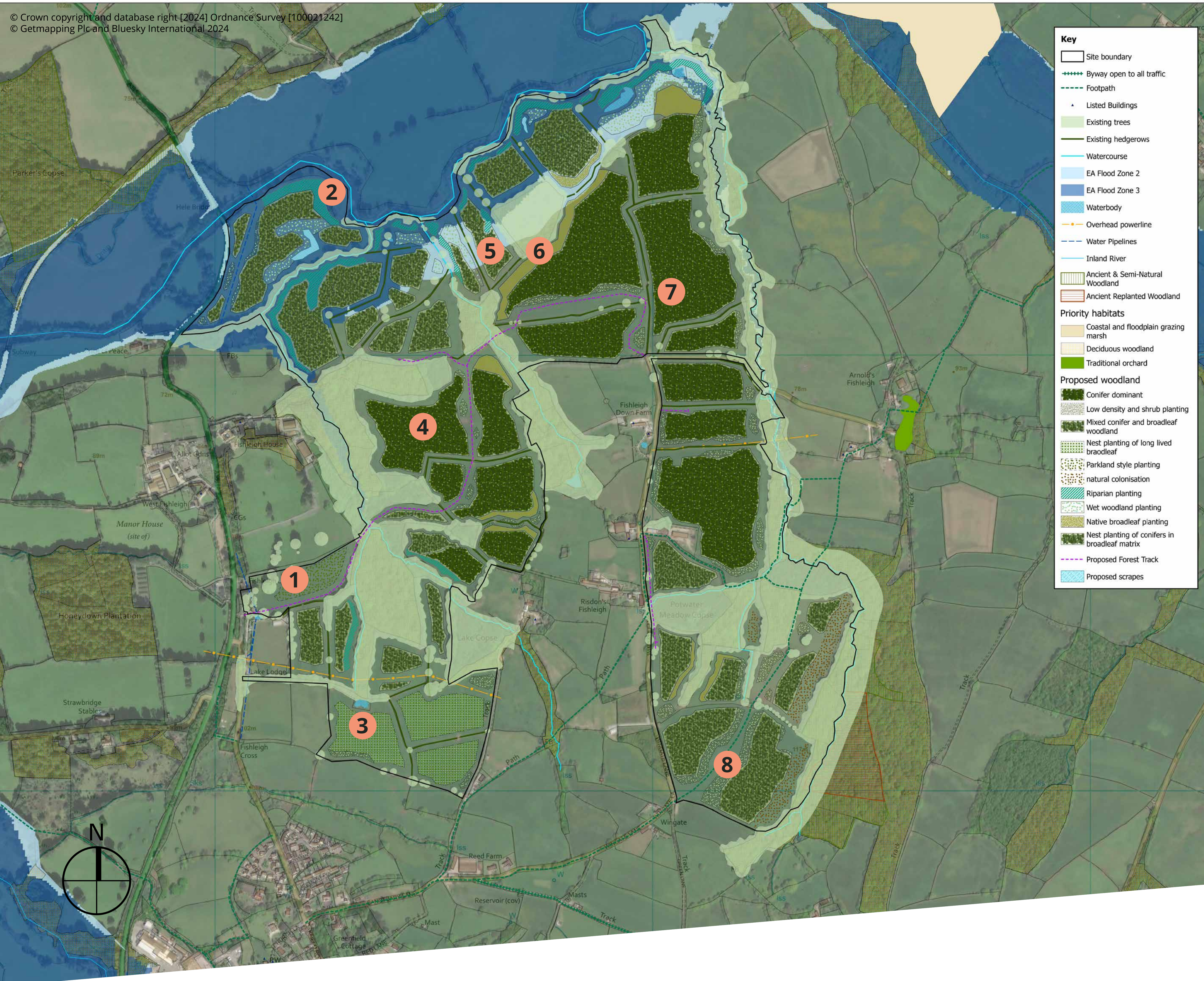
The topography of the site is undulating, rising from 55m above sea level in the north to 135m above sea level at the southern end of the site. There are narrow valleys of small streams that flow into the River Torridge. The small to medium sized fields are bounded mostly by hedgerows.

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.





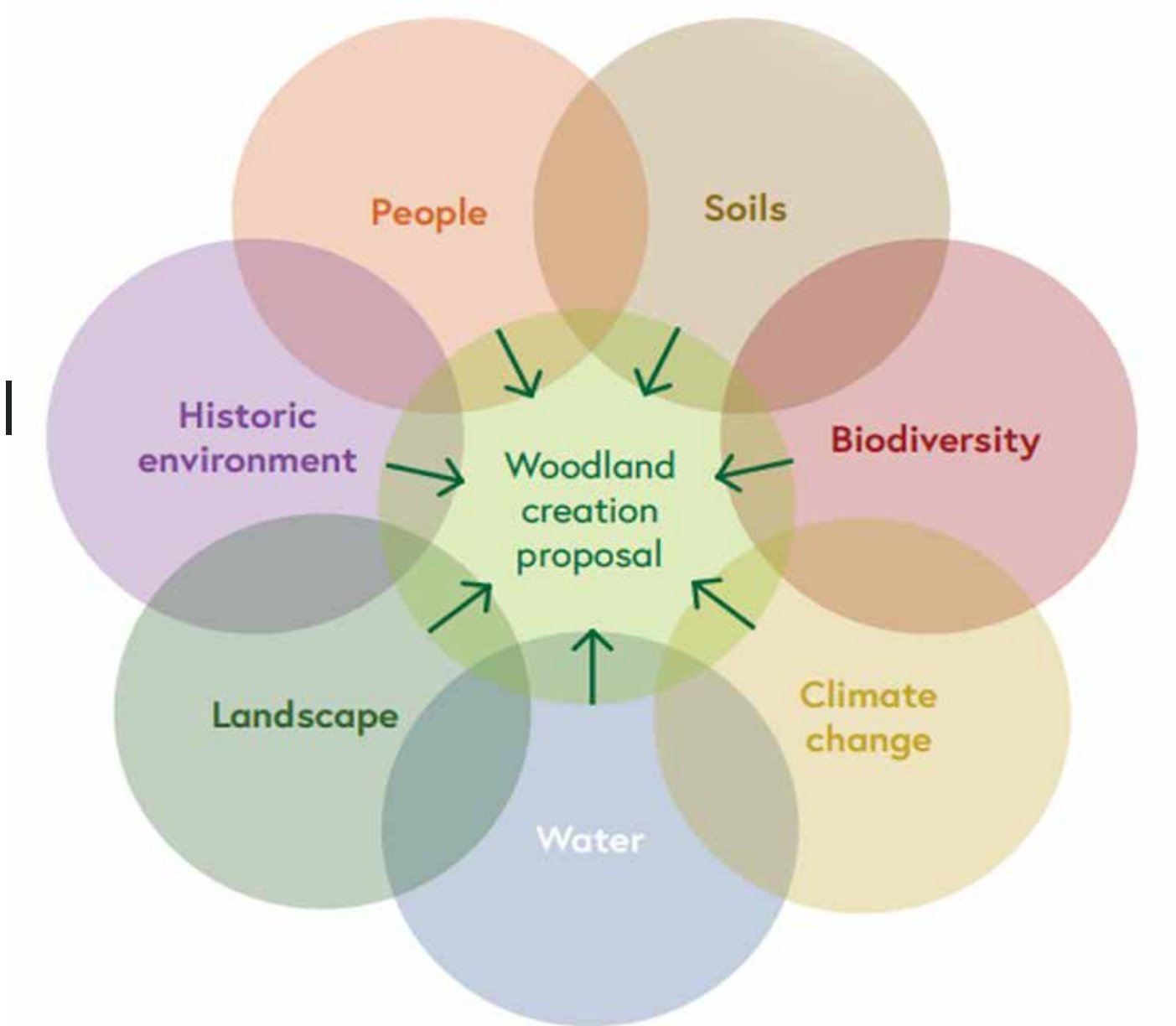
Draft design

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:

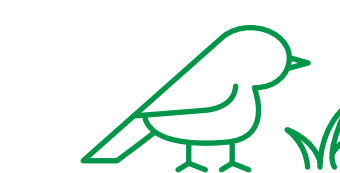
- Preliminary ecological appraisal
- Historic environment records
- Landscape and visual appraisal
- Local environment records
- Soil mapping
- Ecological site classification
- Utilities searches
- Responses to initial consultation



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.

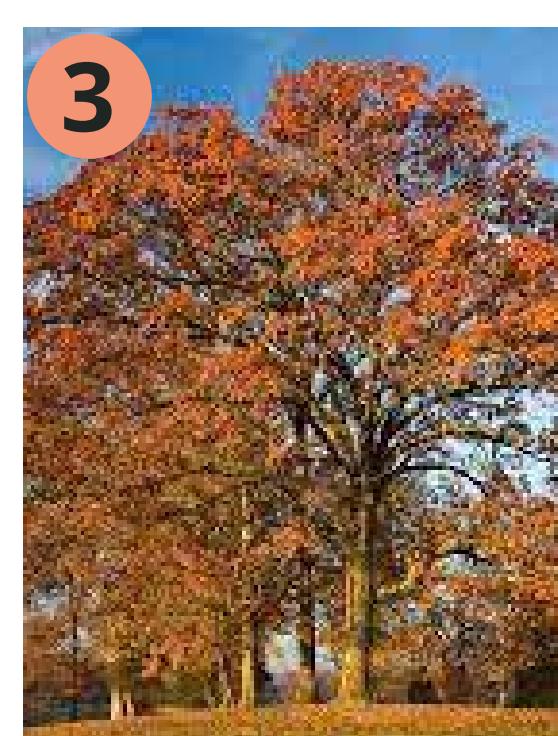
Tree species we could plant



Pedunculate oak in mixes with small leaf lime and horse chestnut



Alder in mixes with pedunculate oak, black poplar and goat willow



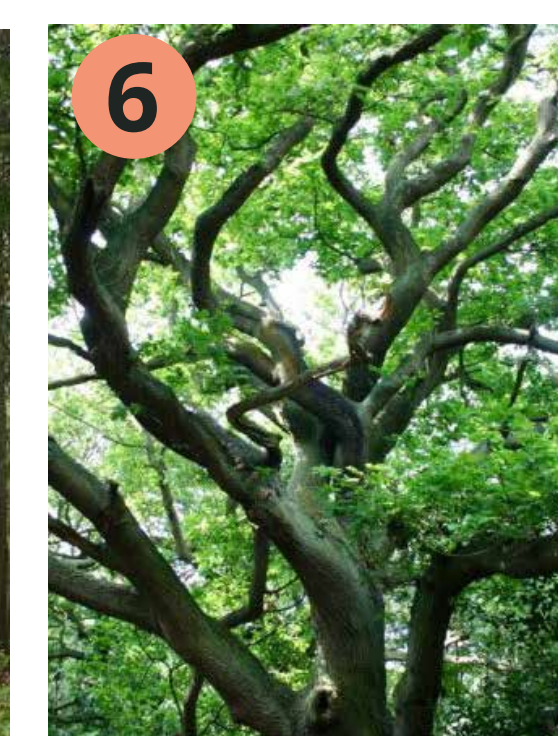
Red oak planted in nests with hornbeam and Italian alder



Oriental spruce in mixes with Japanese red cedar and Norway maple



Western red cedar in mixes with Japanese red cedar, Italian alder and hybrid poplar



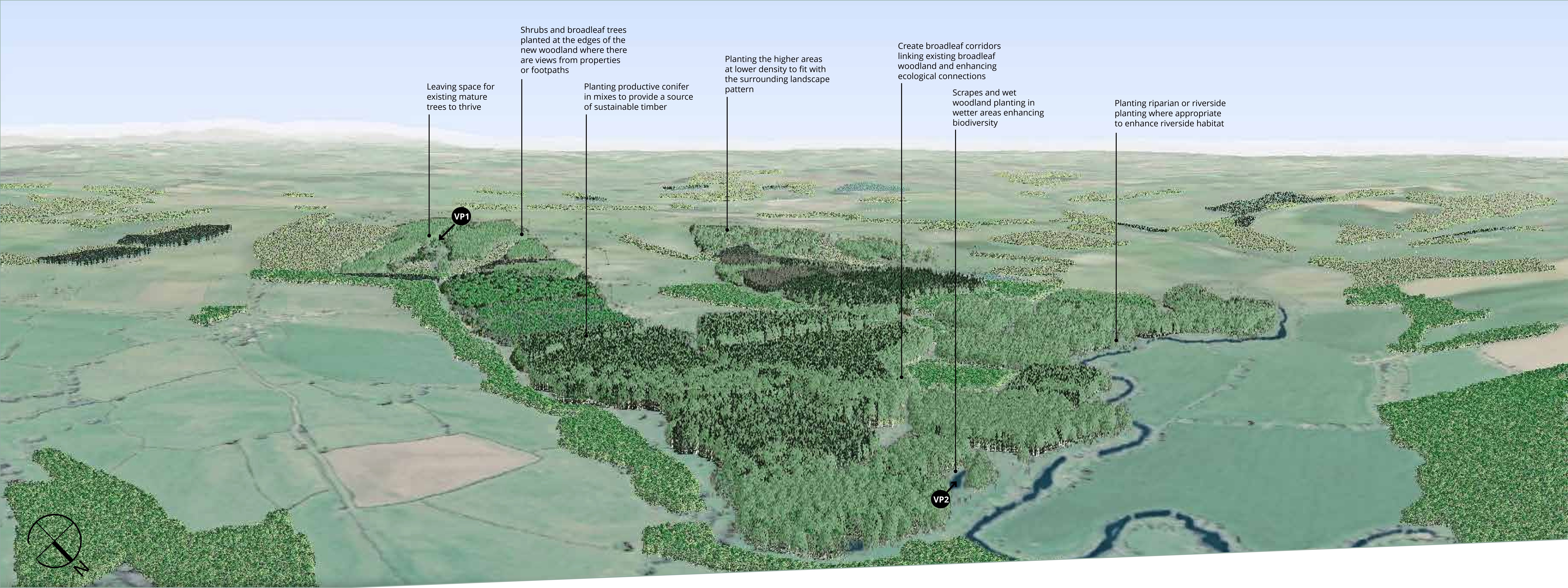
Sessile oak in mixes with wild cherry, field maple, silver birch and hornbeam



Douglas fir in mixes with western red cedar, sycamore and small leaf lime



Shrubs and small trees including **wild cherry**, crab apple, hawthorn, dogwood and guelder rose



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



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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

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