

Woodland Trust Ancient Woodland and Standing Advice Survey to Planners

Purpose of the survey

- The Trust has accumulated anecdotal evidence that planners do not fully understand the significance of ancient woodland or even what it is. At planning events, our speakers asked for a show of hands to indicate which people knew how ancient woodland is defined and which used Natural England's Standing Advice on Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees in planning - the results were poor. There were also instances where ancient woodland had not been recognised as a constraint in a planning application because the Planning Officer did not know that there was an ancient woodland mapping layer on their system.
- These are worrying messages concerning Natural England's Standing Advice and how it is used by planners. The survey aimed to find out more about the awareness and use of the Standing Advice.
- We decided to take the opportunity to formalise this evidence and create a document that could be used more practically when talking to Local Planning Authorities and Government.

Method and dissemination

- The survey opened on 20 July 2016 and closed on 9 September 2016.
- The survey was designed to be brief and concise so that planners could complete it in five minutes or less.
- The questions were shared with Natural England and the Forestry Commission and their input was much appreciated.
- A prize draw was offered as an incentive: £100 of Sainsbury's vouchers.
- The survey was disseminated to planners via various different media:
 - o Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) regional newsletters, it went to every region in the country
 - o Letter in *The Planner* (received by all RTPI members)
 - o Letter sent to all Chief Planning Officers in England
 - o RTPI Young Planner Network
 - o Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) newsletter
 - o Social Media: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn



Results

- 521 respondents
- 73% RTPI Members
- 51% Chartered RTPI members
- Respondents were spread across England
- Relatively even spread concerning how long respondents had been working in planning
- Spread across a number of sectors but majority in District Councils 44%

Key Findings – Ancient Woodland

- 96% aware of the term ‘ancient woodland’
- Significantly, only 27% were aware of the term ‘Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites’ (PAWS)
- 43% said ancient woodland is a priority in their area
- 73% were unaware as to whether PAWS was a priority locally

Key Findings Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) and Ancient Tree Inventory (ATI)

- 33% aware of the AWI
- 22% aware of ATI
- 15% use the AWI
- 8% use the ATI

Key Findings – Standing Advice

- 21% use the Standing Advice
- 70% don’t use it
- 9% were unsure as to whether they use it
- Of those who use the Standing Advice, 32% had been made formally aware of it

Ancient Woodland and Development

- When asked about ancient woodland and development only 15% said ancient woodland should never be developed.
- Of the 85% who believed that ancient woodland could be lost to development, many cited the National Planning Policy Framework and mentioned reasons including housing pressures and the need for new infrastructure provision.

Ecological Advice

- Everyone surveyed had access to ecological support but only 57% had access to an in-house ecologist.

Next steps

- 43% wanted more information about ancient woodland and 28% agreed to participate in further research.
- The Trust is preparing more detailed follow up interviews on ancient woodland in the planning balance to decide whether further resources are needed.
- There is clearly a large discrepancy between the understanding of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and PAWS, and there is a clear case for producing appropriate training materials. Webinar/ speaking at conference/CPD sessions with planners are all options.
- Promotion of the Ancient Woodland and Ancient Tree Inventories
- Formalising results into a final report for launch at the Local Government Association conference 2017



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