

[email correspondence 20.03.24]

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for consulting the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust (LRWT) on the draft plans for Clipsham Coronation Wood. The Trust welcomes the proposal to significantly increase habitat provision and connectivity in this part of Rutland, including greater greenspace access for local communities. There are however a number of concerns with the draft proposals, specifically in relation to the suitability of the plans to provide appropriate solutions to the **dual climate and nature emergencies**. We request that the following key issues be addressed in order to significantly improve the long-term ecological value of the initiatives, thus maximising the potential to help put nature into recovery in this part of the Midlands:

- **Choices of tree species** – much greater emphasis should be placed on the role of native tree species, specifically broadleaved species to reflect local conservation priorities. The overall proportion of conifers across the whole scheme and non-native tree selection (together around 80%) is a particular concern. Native tree species are known to support much greater numbers of associated native wildlife such as fungi, lichens, mosses and plants, as well as birds, invertebrates and other animals. Many of these species are threatened and becoming rarer within the region, therefore a much greater proportion of native tree species should be included within the scheme.
- **Strengthening ecological networks for native species** – Proposed plans to connect existing core areas managed for nature conservation, i.e. SSSI woodlands, Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), could be much stronger and an opportunity for greater nature recovery outcomes therefore missed. Significant areas between existing SSSI woodlands and LWS grasslands are to include conifers/non-native trees and may be lost on rotation over time due to felling operations. These areas should include exclusive native broadleaved woodland creation, open habitats to support species-rich calcareous grassland, wetlands and hedgerows to strengthen ecological networks for a wide range of species.
- **Permanence of habitats and connectivity** – It is not clear how much of the proposed habitat creation will be managed in perpetuity to better help address the ecological emergency, and how much will be removed for timber. Plans state that areas of broadleaved habitat will be managed for timber production, however there is no indication on the scale or approach to be employed here. Plans should therefore include areas that are to be managed in perpetuity for nature conservation benefit/resilience and favour connectivity between existing core SSSI/LWS areas.

- **Opportunities and role of open-habitats overlooked** – It is essential that high-value open habitats are not overlooked in the preparation of landscape restoration plans. This part of Rutland supports some of the areas last remaining calcareous grassland, a local and national BAP habitat, with at least x2 designated LWS's for this scarce habitat within the project boundary. How will these areas be protected and enhanced? How will space be made for these areas to recolonise and expand across the treescape? Areas including woodland rides are suitable for calcareous grassland creation, and should form part of the wider landscape restoration strategy in order to align with local conservation priorities.
- **Natural Regeneration opportunities overlooked** - When expanding and creating new areas of woodland, natural regeneration of woodland should be the preferred method for increasing tree cover where it is possible and where it will benefit nature, augmented by the planting of locally native woodland species where necessary from nurseries of locally provenance stock. Areas to allow for natural regeneration should therefore be supported within the initiative.

LRWT believe that new areas of tree cover expansion must be predominantly guided by ecological principles with the overarching aim of creating a Nature Recovery Network. The Forestry Commission, along with other regional partners organisations, must effectively create bigger, better, and more joined-up woodland habitats, thriving with wildlife and accessible to people, while ensuring protection of other vital habitats where tree planting may be ecologically damaging. In this way we can contribute towards the recovery of nature and help to address the dual climate and nature emergencies.

Regards,

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