

Urban and peri-urban woodlands: how do we work together to optimise their contribution to the delivery of benefits to local people and communities?

Purpose

1. To help facilitate discussions on how we can work together to increase the delivery of benefits for people from urban and peri-urban woodlands.

Overview

2. Urban and peri-urban forests and woods contribute to the delivery of a range of policy objectives, including helping address the climate and biodiversity crises. However, what makes them distinct from more rural and/or remote woods is their proximity to substantial numbers of people and their potential to directly improve the lives of over 80% of the population.
3. Over the last 20 years, collective efforts, supported by government and a range of partners, has helped support almost 12,000 hectares of urban or peri-urban woodland to be brought into active management, nearly 2,000 hectares of new woodlands to be created, and just under 600 km of paths to be installed or upgraded. The use of urban and peri-urban woodlands by socially deprived communities also increased by between 20 and 25%.
4. To frame discussions at the National Stakeholder Meeting, using insight gained through a recent policy stocktake exercise, this paper sets out a number of key strategic issues that require consideration, if we are to build on past successes and continue to grow the delivery of benefits to local people and communities from urban and peri-urban woodlands. These strategic issues include:
 - ensuring complementarity of finite resources;
 - the value of building and sustaining partnerships;
 - gaps in skills and capacity;
 - supporting the planning system and town planners to increase sustainably managed woods in and around towns and cities;
 - the sustainability of benefit delivery; and
 - identifying priority areas.
5. To help identify the priority activities that participants and others will work together on to optimise the delivery of benefits for people from urban and peri-urban woodlands, the paper concludes by setting out three questions for discussion at the meeting:

- i. **Do you think these are the key strategic issues that need to be considered or are there other ones we've missed?**
- ii. **What are the priorities for action to work on collectively?**
- iii. **How can your organisation contribute and help ensure Scotland's urban woodlands deliver more for people?**

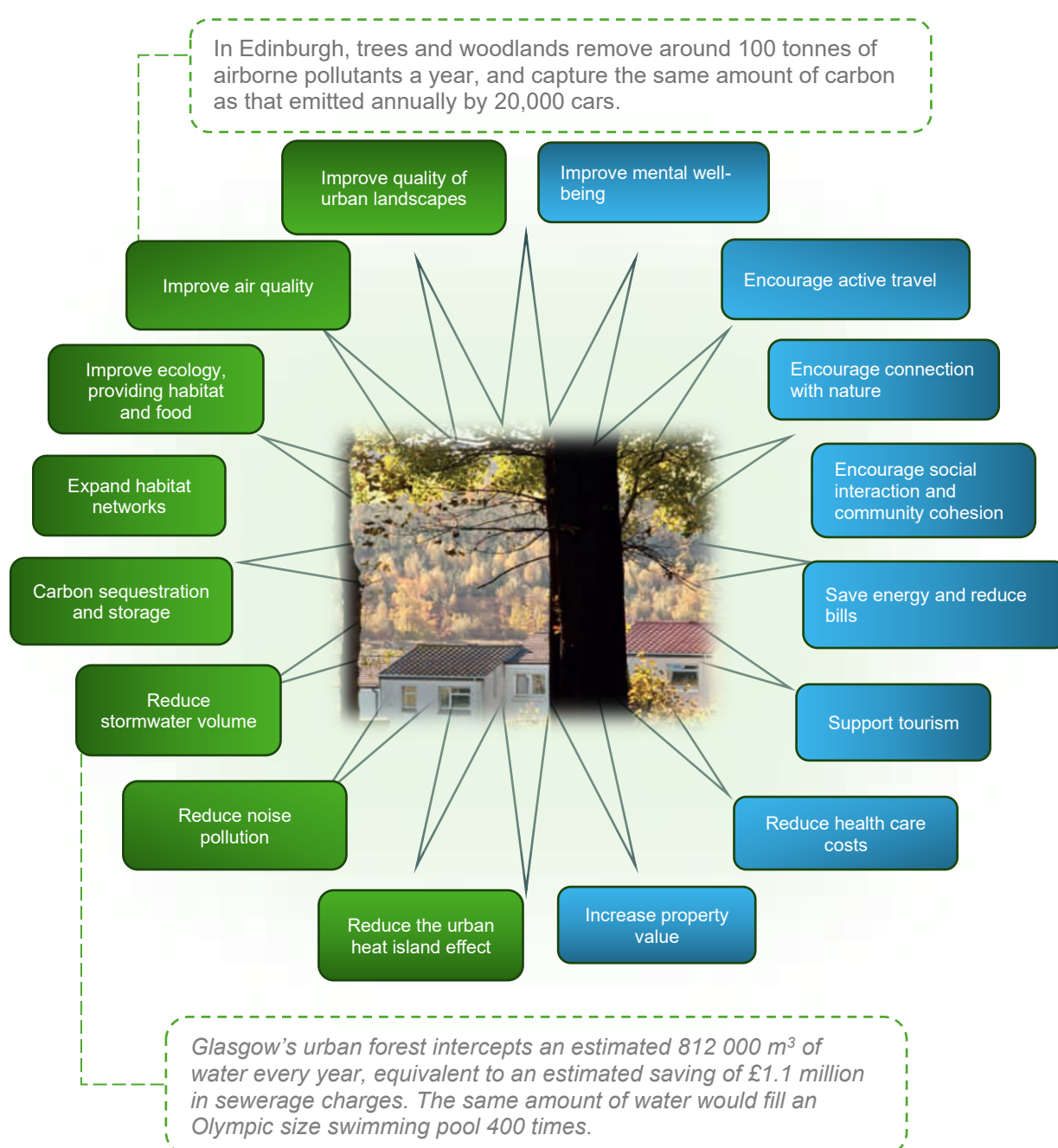
Background

6. Scotland's forests and woodlands deliver a wide range of public and community benefits, including mental health and well-being benefits derived from direct access and use; economic benefits through, for example, tourism, skills development and jobs; as well as environmental benefits such as contributing to natural flood management, improving air quality, carbon sequestration and increasing biodiversity.
7. Given that more than 80% of the Scottish population live in towns and cities, Scotland's Forestry Strategy recognises the importance of urban forests and woodlands to ensuring that as many people as possible experience the multiple benefits or ecosystem services¹ woods and forests deliver (see the diagram on page 3 for an overview of potential benefits).
8. It also acknowledges the need for continued partnership working between communities, public bodies, and the third and private sectors to ensure successful delivery of benefits.
9. The recognition of the importance of woods close to towns and cities is not new. In 2005, the Woodlands In and Around Town (WIAT) initiative was launched and is still in place to date, although it has evolved over the years to reflect changing environmental and social priorities.
10. Over the last 20 years, it has achieved significant successes. For example, between 2005 and 2021, almost 12,000 hectares of urban and peri-urban woodland was brought into active management and nearly 2,000 hectares of new woodlands were created. In the same time period, over 75 hectares of vacant and derelict land was restored to woodland, and just shy of 600 km of paths were created or upgraded.
11. Use of peri-urban and urban woodlands also increased during those years, with a 20-25% increase in use by people from socially deprived communities and a 30% increase in use by those aged between 20 and 49.
12. At present, support for urban and peri-urban woodlands focuses on:
 - Protecting existing woodlands and bringing them into active management;
 - Creating new woodland; and
 - Activities that help people use and enjoy woods.

¹ [Delivery of ecosystem services by urban forests \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](https://forestresearch.gov.uk/)

13. Delivery of this support is through a number of mechanisms including: planning conditions; the provision of targeted forestry grants for planning, establishing and managing woodlands, as well as for activities that help build people's confidence to engage with and use their local woodlands; direct delivery by Forestry and Land Scotland; partnership funding for project officers to develop projects; and continued research and evaluation of delivery activities.
14. Other associated activities include support to deliver community outreach activities such as [Woods for All](#) (engaging under-represented groups), [Branching Out](#) (supporting positive mental health through woodland-based activities), and [Outdoor Woodland Learning Scotland](#).

Benefits of urban and peri-urban woodlands



Delivery examples

Castlemilk²

Through collaboration and dedicated resources, Cassiltoun Housing Association has not only revitalised a woodland but also uplifted lives, fostered social cohesion, skills development, and created a renewed connection to nature.

Castlemilk Woodlands is a community managed, 30 hectare area, sitting within the extensive Castlemilk Park in south-east Glasgow. Its neighbouring residents live in one of a number of housing schemes developed in the 1950s to rehouse people from inner city areas. Over the years, Castlemilk has experienced a range of social problems because of structural inequality.

In 2009, the Cassiltoun Housing Association, a pioneering community-owned housing cooperative, embarked on a project at Castlemilk Park with Glasgow City Council and what was then Forestry Commission Scotland. The objective was to create access and opportunity within the park - fostering environmental, community and economic benefits for the area.

The project has been supported by a number of funders including the Council and Scottish Forestry. It has also attracted support for specific pieces of work, including from Paths For All, the Linn Area Partnership Committee, Cycling Scotland, Youth Scotland, Greenspace Scotland, and Action Earth. Underpinned by a feasibility study and a robust action plan, Cassiltoun Housing Association recruited a Community Woodland Officer in 2011.

The creation of this dedicated post has proved pivotal in connecting local people to the park and responding to local people's aspirations for their woodland including through the delivery of an extensive programme of over 900 events. This vibrant range of free activities, educational initiatives, and outdoor experiences has transformed recreational and employment opportunities for the local and wider community.

There was some initial scepticism at the outset that the project would not make a difference to local people. However, its success in drawing people to the woodland and the subsequent delivery of life skills, qualifications, and confidence, and improved mental and physical well-being, has given locals an increased sense of pride and ownership, and has encouraged even more sharing of the skills and knowledge that Castlemilk is brimming with.

Adapted from: [Community benefits: a bridge to community empowerment](#)

² The local woodlands in Castlemilk Park and Cathkin Braes were some of the first to receive woodland management grant funding under the WIAT initiative, and for over 15 years, Scottish Forestry have been contributing funding towards the Community Woodland Officer post. In 2022, with the help of school children from Glasgow, forestry grant funding also supported the creation of a new 13 hectare woodland on the edge of Castlemilk: [Scottish Forestry - Over 1,200 primary School Children to Create the Glasgow Children's Woodland ahead of COP26](#)

Climate Forests

The [Clyde Climate Forest](#) (CCF), [Forth Climate Forest](#) (FoCF), and [Fife Climate Forest](#) (FiCF) are partnership initiatives that, between them, involve a wide range of stakeholders, including twelve local authorities, Climate Action Fife, Fife Coast and Countryside Trust, Future Woodlands Scotland, Glasgow Clyde Valley Green Network, Green Action Trust, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Scotland's International Environment Centre (Stirling University), Scottish Forestry, The Conservation Volunteers, Trees for Cities, and Woodland Trust Scotland.

They aim to increase the urban, peri-urban and rural wooded area and tree canopy cover in their respective regions. Both CCF and FoCF have ten-year ambitions to increase tree planting and woodland cover by around 1,800 hectares a year – equivalent to around 10% of the national annual target of 18,000 hectares a year in 2024/25.

The CCF was established in 2021, and is referenced in [NPF4](#) as part of the transformational programme of environmental action working towards improving the quality and benefits of green spaces across the Glasgow city region, and bringing biodiversity closer to communities.

It has three core aims and ambitions to: increase canopy cover in the Glasgow City region from 17% to 20% by 2031; improve connectivity between woodland and other habitats; and contribute to Net Zero through carbon sequestration.

Part of the CCF approach includes the identification of target neighbourhoods that currently have low tree canopy cover and are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. A number of these are areas of high social deprivation.

The FoCF is a more recent initiative, launched in February 2024, and has similar core aims and ambitions to the CCF, with a focus on: canopy, connectivity, carbon and communities. The FoCF aspires to increase woodland cover in Stirling, Clackmananshire and Falkirk by planting around 16.4 million new trees across 8,300 hectares within the next 10 years.

Even more recently, in October 2024, Fife Climate Forest was launched as a partnership initiative with a shared vision to grow and protect Fife's trees, woods and forests. Its vision is built around three aspects: connect, grow, and thrive.

Between them, these three climate forest partnership initiatives cover nearly 50% of the Scottish population.

A spotlight on delivering for local people and communities

15. In considering priority areas for action to deliver increased benefits to people from urban and peri-urban woodlands, we have carried out a policy stocktake. This included, amongst other activities, discussions with key stakeholders and an assessment of the current Government strategic objectives that urban and peri-urban forests are best placed to help deliver.
16. As per the diagram on page three, it is clear that urban and peri-urban woodlands can make a significant contribution to the delivery of a range of policy objectives, including addressing the climate and biodiversity crises.
17. These are, of course, important priorities for Government, but, while the creation and management of all forests and woodlands contributes to realising climate and biodiversity objectives, what makes urban and peri-urban woodlands distinct from their more rural and/or remote counterparts, is their proximity to substantial numbers of people.
18. Consequently, in addition to, and to complement the delivery of public benefits from urban and peri-urban woods, it is apposite that particular attention is given to optimising the delivery of benefits specific to the people and communities that live close by.
19. Thinking about urban woodlands through this lens will help ensure efforts contribute to the delivery of the following outcomes within the proposed update to the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, laid in Parliament earlier this year:
 - a. Communities: *We live in communities that are connected, inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.*
Indicators for the new National Outcomes will be revised in due course, but one of the indicators used to measure progress towards the current Communities Outcome is the proportion of adults who live within a 5 minute walk of their nearest green or blue space. There is also evidence that shows that good quality, accessible greenspace, including urban and peri-urban woodlands, can help to promote social interaction, inclusion and cohesion.³
 - b. Environment: *We actively protect, restore, enhance and enjoy our natural environment.*
One of the indicators used to measure progress towards the current Environment Outcome is frequency of visits to the outdoors. By encouraging people to enjoy their natural environment we can improve their sense of connection to the natural world and help foster support for its protection and enhancement.
 - c. Health: *We are mentally and physically healthy and active.*
One of the indicators used to measure progress towards the current Health Outcome is journeys taken by active travel, which is something urban

³ [Benefits of green infrastructure \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](https://forestresearch.gov.uk)

woodlands can help support through the provision of traffic-free routes. Making it easier for people to walk, wheel or cycle on everyday journeys was an ambition reaffirmed in this year's Programme for Government,⁴ which also set out key ambitions of ensuring that people have access to high-quality services, such as health services, when they need them, and tackling health inequalities. Urban woodlands have been referred to as part of a "natural health service"⁵ and evidence shows the value of the benefits they can deliver in terms of both physical and, in particular, mental health and well-being⁶. For example, the annual value of mental health benefits associated with visits to woodlands in Scotland has been estimated as £26 million⁷.

d. Climate Action: We live sustainably, achieve a just transition to net zero and build Scotland's resilience to climate change.

This Outcome is a new proposition and it isn't yet clear what indicators will be used to measure progress towards it. However, the 2024-25 Programme for Government set out a number of actions to both mitigate climate change and accelerate action on adapting to it, including planting at least 10,000 hectares of woodlands and publishing sectoral Just Transition Plans, including one for land use and agriculture. Achieving a just transition means that both the process and outcome of achieving net zero emissions by 2045 should be fair and benefit everybody, both rural and urban populations. While urban and peri-urban woodlands can help to address the climate emergency through sequestering carbon, they can also support urban populations to adapt to climate change through, for example, cooling and shading and through contributing to natural flood protection⁸.

20. Placing a spotlight on how we can optimise the benefits urban and peri-urban woodlands provide to local people and communities also aligns with the ambitions set out in [National Planning Framework 4](#) (NPF4), to support the planning and delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places.
21. Amongst other things, NPF4 seeks to: support the delivery of places that help people adapt to the impacts of climate change and deliver a just transition, (meaning the journey to a net zero society and nature recovery is fair to everyone); support the delivery of neighbourhoods that are healthier, affordable and vibrant places to live, where people can meet their needs locally; and support the development of places that attract new investment, and stimulate entrepreneurship and GDP (which is easier if they are greener and healthier places to live and work)⁹.
22. Also of relevance is the Government's adoption of the internationally recognised [Community Wealth Building](#) (CWB) approach to economic development. Within

⁴ [Programme for Government 2024-25: Serving Scotland \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

⁵ [Our Natural Health Service | NatureScot](#)

⁶ [A review of urban health, health inequalities and the role of urban forestry in Britain \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Valuing the mental health benefits of woodlands \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸ [Delivery of ecosystem services by urban forests \(forestresearch.gov.uk\)](#)

⁹ [Economic benefits of greenspace | Forest Research](#)

the [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#), CWB is presented as a key practical means by which progress can be made towards realising a wellbeing economy. It incorporates the principle of a socially just use of land and aims to ensure the economic system builds wealth and prosperity for everyone, with communities receiving more of the benefits from the wealth they help to generate.

Key strategic issues for consideration

23. The policy stocktake identified a number of key strategic issues that should be considered, in terms of both opportunities and challenges to optimising benefit delivery from urban and peri-urban woodlands. These are detailed below.
24. **Ensuring complementarity of finite resources:** In the urban context, reflecting its purpose, expertise and capacity, Scottish Forestry's focus will continue to be on woodlands, but we must ensure that the evolution of support for urban woodlands complements other initiatives and funding support aiming to increase tree canopy cover, as well as the work of local authorities and delivery partners on trees outside of woodlands. Ideally these different funding sources and initiatives (e.g. city regional deal funding, Trees for Cities, Future Woodlands Scotland and Scottish Government grants) should contribute towards a set of common outcomes.
25. **Building and sustaining partnerships:** An important lesson from efforts to date is the value of strong partnerships to develop and deliver associated projects. A key question is how we can collectively build on the strong foundations to sustain this work in future, and at the same time remain open to the opportunities that new partners, from different sectors can offer (e.g. town planners, transport engineers etc).
26. **Addressing skills and capacity gaps:** Developing skills and attracting more people into the land management and forestry sectors is an on-going challenge and work under the Forestry Sector Skills Strategy is aiming to address this. The need for urban forestry skills needs to be articulated through these related processes but are there other ways in which collectively we can help address this challenge? In addition, the issue of project management capacity, to develop projects and secure funding needs consideration.
27. **Supporting the planning system and town planners to increase sustainably managed woods in and around towns:** under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, planning authorities are required to publish both Forestry and Woodland Strategies and Open Space Strategies. In line with the principles of the Verity House Agreement¹⁰, to support the expansion of sustainably managed woods, collaboration is required to ensure these strategies are aligned and that associated guidance promotes urban and peri-urban woodlands, as well as the

¹⁰ The Verity House Agreement is an agreement between the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Government. It includes agreement to the maxim “**local by default, national by agreement,**” recognising that public responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen. Allocation of responsibilities to another authority should weigh up the extent and nature of the task and requirements of efficiency and economy.

wider urban forest. In addition, it is important to consider the support town planners require to identify opportunities to deliver the expansion and management of these woodlands through the development management process (e.g. new woodland planting associated with housing developments)

28. **The sustainability of benefit delivery:** under the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018, Scottish Ministers and all public authorities have a duty to promote sustainable forest management, which is underpinned by Scotland's Forestry Strategy and the UK Forestry Standard. Woodland management plans are a key means through which this duty is delivered and are recognised internationally as a core mechanism to ensure woodlands are sustainably managed and will continue to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits now and into the future. These plans help communicate an owners intentions and set out the actions necessary to realise their objectives and deliver the benefits required from the woods, such as improving biodiversity, enhancing public access, and mitigating climate change. They also identify how challenges such as tree pests and diseases and a changing climate will be addressed. Having a current management plan indicates a woodland is managed. Currently around 60% of Scotland's woods are managed but within the WIAT area, this falls to only 25%.

29. **Identifying priority areas:**

a) Localness

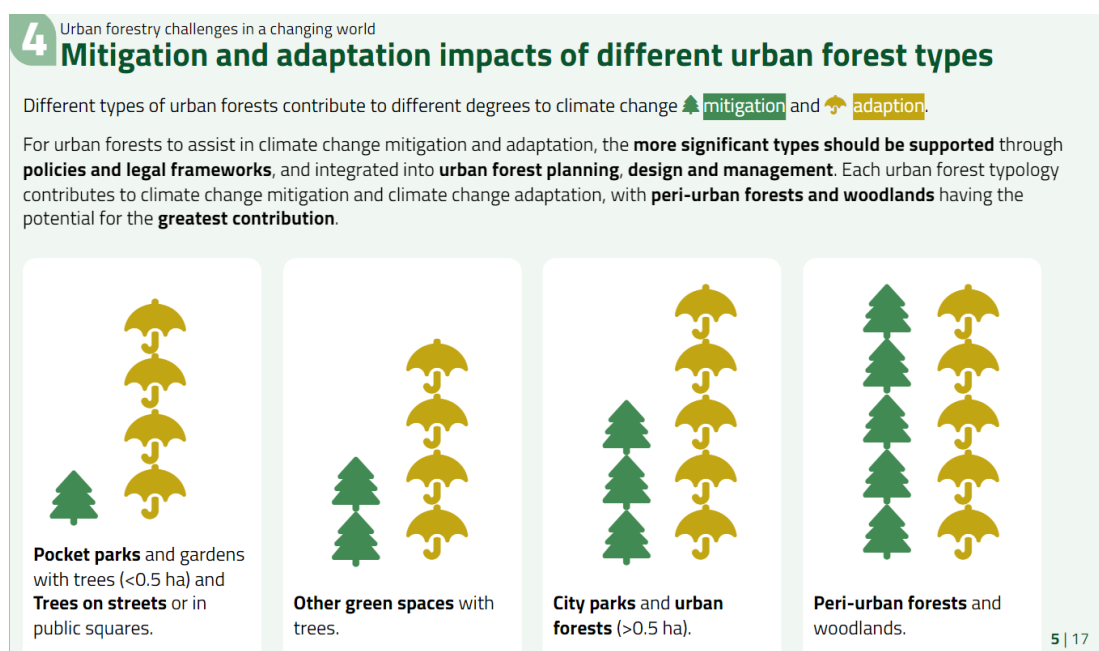
Urban woods closest to where people live typically make the biggest contribution to the delivery of benefits that rely on physical access to, and use of woodlands. Conversely, there is evidence that for some benefits unrelated to access, such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, peri-urban forests and woodlands can make a higher contribution than those woodlands situated within the town or city itself, as per the diagram below. There is therefore a question around whether it is more important to focus on one category of woodlands rather than the other, or both, as well as questions around whether there are different opportunities and different challenges associated with urban and peri-urban woodlands.

Intrinsically linked to this is the question of appropriately defining localness. Physical distance has been used to identify urban and peri-urban woodlands that are a priority for investment, as they can be easily accessed by more people. For example, the WIAT initiative is currently targeted at areas within 1 km of settlement of 2,000 people or more. However, 'reasonable' distances to travel are highly subjective and are strongly influenced by people's mobility and motivation to make the journey. Internationally, as part of the 3:30:300 rule¹¹, the idea that everyone should have access to high-quality greenspace within 300 m of their home is being promoted. Time is another unit to express 'localness', as seen in the Government's policy on 20 minute neighbourhoods¹² and as stated previously, one of the indicators used to measure progress against the

¹¹ [Promoting health and wellbeing through urban forests – Introducing the 3-30-300 rule - IUCN Urban Alliance](#)

¹² [Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods: planning guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Communities Outcome in the National Performance Framework is the proportion of adults who live within a 5 minute walk of their nearest green or blue space.



Slide taken from: [An introduction to Urban and Peri-urban Forestry | FAO elearning Academy](#)

b) Targeting areas with the potential to deliver greatest benefits

To help identify areas most in need of investment, the Scottish Government and others have used the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\)](#), which is “a tool for identifying the places in Scotland where people are experiencing disadvantage across different aspects of their lives.” This focus is as important now as it ever was, if not more so, given the Government’s single greatest priority is eradicating child poverty and ensuring no individual’s opportunities are dictated by the circumstances they are born into¹³. However, in addition, other local environmental attributes could also be used to help target funding such as area of local woodland and tree canopy cover, which has been used for targeting purposes by the Clyde Climate Forest, for example. There are also tools available that seek to combine analysis of a number of variables to identify priority areas, such as Tree Equity Score (TES),¹⁴ Tree Equity Score (TES), which considers existing canopy cover, as well as income, employment, health, air quality, heat severity and dependency ratio (older people and children versus working-age adults).

c) Settlement size and/or density

The Government definition of ‘large urban areas’¹⁵ is settlements with a population of 125,000 or more. ‘Other urban areas’ are categorised as those with a population of between 10,000 and 124,000. Below that, ‘small towns’ are defined as settlements with a population of 3,000-9,999 people and rural settlements as those a population less than 3,000. The WIAT initiative currently

¹³ [Programme for Government 2024-25: Serving Scotland \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

¹⁴ [Tree Equity Score](#)

¹⁵ [Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

targets areas with a population of >2,000 people. This threshold was originally chosen to enable a broader range of settlements to benefit. On the other hand, TES analysis in Scotland, which is being used by a number of initiatives to target efforts, focuses on urban settlements with a population of 10,000 or more. Where should our collective, finite resources be focused to optimise benefit delivery in a fair way?

National Forestry Stakeholder Group Meeting

30. At the meeting, participants will be asked to discuss the following questions:

- i. **Do you think these are the key strategic issues that need to be considered or are there other ones we've missed?**
- ii. **What are the priorities for action to work on collectively?**
- iii. **How can your organisation contribute and help ensure Scotland's urban woodlands deliver more for people?**

Next steps

A note of the meeting will be circulated to participants and published. The key points will help identify the things we will work on together to optimise the delivery of benefits for people from urban and peri-urban woodlands.

06 November 2024
Scottish Forestry