

# Introduction

This consultation is to enable all stakeholders to participate in the review of the Armagh Forestry Planning Area (FPA) at the earliest possible stage. This scoping consultation is being carried out to find out which of the topics identified in this document are relevant to you as a stakeholder. The consultation gives you the opportunity to say if you would like to engage with the Forestry Planning Team in relation to any opportunities identified in the document.

## Forestry Planning

[Forestry planning](#) facilitates the delivery of the many different services our forests and woodlands provide, such as sustainable wood production, carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and recreational opportunities. Reviewing forest plans ensures that they are up to date and that forests continue to meet the diverse and sometimes competing needs of people, wildlife, and wood processing industries.

## Armagh Forestry Planning Area

The Armagh FPA includes all forests and woodlands within the geographic boundaries of Co. Armagh. The distribution of forests and woodlands in Armagh FPA is recorded in the [Northern Ireland Woodland Register and Basemap](#) and is shown in Map 1. Forests and woodland are estimated to cover around 6,900 hectares (ha), which is 5.4% of the FPA. Forest Service manages 39% (2,700 ha) of the area of forests and woodland in Armagh FPA.

Map 1 - Forests and woodland within Armagh Forestry Planning Area (FPA)

Click map to see larger image



Armagh Forestry Planning Area



Forest Service forests



Other forest and woodland



City/Town

Forests managed by Forest Service within the Armagh FPA are predominantly [coniferous](#) in character, although many include [broadleaved](#) and [mixed plantations](#). Most of these forests are in the southern half of the FPA. The areas and composition of forests managed by Forest Service are shown in [Appendix I](#).

Forest Service forests are managed to meet a range of sustainable development objectives in line with the requirements of the [UK Forestry Standard](#), which is the UK Governments' statement on [sustainable forestry](#), Forest Service contributes to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' (DAERA's) purpose of '*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone*'. Sustainable forest management supports the work of the Department for the Economy, on energy policy, and the Strategic Investment Board in delivering a public sector energy strategy.



For forest design planning purposes, Forest Service forests are grouped into three forest landscape units: Slieve Gullion, The Fews and Gosford, reflecting the wide range of landscape characters in the County.

Forests and woodlands in Armagh that are not managed by Forest Service are typically fragmented and **broadleaved** in character. The [NI Woodland Register and Basemap](#) indicates that these are comprised of more than 6,000 small broadleaved or mixed woodlands less than 1 ha in size. They are scattered throughout the lowland farmed landscape and close to Armagh City and the urban areas of Portadown, Lurgan and Craigavon. There are a few larger areas of **broadleaved** and **mixed woodland** (up to 89 ha in area), occurring within or close to nature reserves, such as Peatlands Country Park. Larger areas of woodland also occur in historic country estates, including The Argory, which is managed by the National Trust, and Tynan Estate. There are also a small number of mainly **coniferous** plantations (up to 23 ha in area) located mostly in the west and southern upland areas of the FPA.

More detailed information on non-Forest Service forests and woodlands, and on woodland owners' management objectives, may be available for woodland managed by public bodies, or where the land is managed under a forestry grant scheme, or has been subject to a felling licence.

[Regional Landscape Character Assessments](#) (RLCAs) are geographical descriptions of the landscape that reflect the distinctiveness of different parts of Northern Ireland, including the extent of forests and woodland. Armagh FPA includes parts of four RLCAs: Lough Neagh Basin RLCA in the north, Southern Drumlins and Orchards RLCA to the north-west, Newry Valley and Upper Bann RLCA, to the north-east, and Slieve Gullion and South Armagh Hills RLCA in the south.

Armagh FPA includes a limited number of important areas of **native** and **semi-natural woodland** designated as **Area of Special Scientific Interest** (ASSI). The largest is Peatlands Park ASSI which is also a **Special Area of Conservation** (SAC). The FPA also includes Caledon and Tynan ASSI, which is a nationally important example of parkland. Lough Neagh ASSI and Brackagh Bog ASSI both include alluvial woodland as an important feature.

Designated areas adjacent to and on land managed by Forest Service are listed in Table 1 of [Appendix II](#).

## **Participation and Engagement**

Forestry planning involves engaging with people, whether as individuals or as representatives of stakeholder organisations, or relevant bodies. The purpose of the engagement is to ensure that a wide range of interests are considered, including those of local communities and specialist interest groups. Armagh FPA overlaps two council areas: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, to the north, and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to the south.

## **Woodland Development**

Approximately 15% of the 6,900 ha of forest and woodland in the Armagh FPA is described in the [Northern Ireland Ancient Woodland Inventory](#) as woodland on sites which have been continuously wooded since at least 1830. The ancient woodland inventory is based on a combination of archive evidence and field survey, and provides some information on the composition of woodland. Much of this woodland is easily accessible, including parts of Gosford, Carnagh and Slieve Gullion forests, and in Peatlands Park, which is managed by the NI Environment Agency (NIEA).

State forestry began in Armagh with the purchase of 83 ha of land at Fathom in 1930. Forest expansion continued in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s with forests created in Slieve Gullion, Cold Brae, Camlough, Seagahan and Loughgall. Most notably, due to its larger area,



was The Fews, where over 690 ha of land was purchased between 1951 and 1959. Forest establishment peaked in the 1960s with the continued expansion of Loughgall, Slieve Gullion and The Fews forests, amongst others. Although the area of new planting has decreased every decade since then, small annual increases in forest area occurred until the late 1990s. The development of visitor attractions and facilities has featured in Gosford and Slieve Gullion forests, which were named as Forest Parks in 1969 and 1981 respectively.

The rate of increase in woodland area outside of state forestry since the beginning of the 20th Century is not well documented. Information available from an inventory of private woodland undertaken in 1975-79, and other Forest Service records, indicates that approximately 34% of the current non-Forest Service woodland area in the Armagh FPA is comprised of grant-aided planting since 1970. The remainder is divided between woodland referred to in the private woodland inventory, and woodland derived from scrub and woodland succession (as noted in reports of the [Northern Ireland Countryside Survey 1998 and 2007](#)).

## Forest Plans

Forest plans provide the direction for interventions that will affect the future appearance, composition, or design of forests. Forest plans show areas of felling (which are individually referred to as [coupes](#)), the [regeneration](#) of felled areas, management to retain areas under continuous woodland cover, and changes to the type of trees that grow in the forest.

Forest design aims to ensure that there is continuity of woodland for timber and wood products and the delivery of a range of non-timber benefits. These benefits include landscape improvement, water protection, places for people, and protection of habitats, including [ancient](#) and [native woodland](#).

Forest Service seeks greater involvement of people in the revision of its forest plans, which has taken place on a five yearly cycle for many decades. The forest management plan for Armagh forests was last reviewed in 2014 ([Armagh Planning Review 2014](#)). The Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 placed a duty on Forest Service to promote [afforestation](#) and [sustainable forestry](#), and therefore, Forest Service plans will in future include references to non-Forest Service forest and woodland.

## Achievements

Achievements of the previous forest plan for forests in the Armagh FPA during the period 2014 – 2020 are highlighted in the box below.

- Implementing forest design plans for 293 hectares (ha) of forest, including the creation of additional [water buffer](#) areas to enhance water quality and protect aquatic habitats.
- Grant aiding the creation of 122 ha of new woodland.
- Producing an average of 27,000 cubic metres of timber each year to supply the timber processing industry, creating jobs in rural areas and providing resources to reinvest in forests.
- Regenerating 268 ha of Forest Service forest land after [clearfelling](#) and planting over 700,000 trees.
- Development of walking trails at Mountain Lodge, Darkley, in The Fews Forest, in partnership with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.
- Development of a walking trail in Seagahan Forest in partnership with Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and NI Water.
- Development of a walking trail in Camlough Forest in partnership with Newry and Mourne District Council.
- Development of a walking trail in Fathom Forest in partnership with Newry and Mourne District Council.



- Development of walking trails, a play park and car parking facilities in Carnagh Forest in partnership with Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.
- Development of walking trails, a picnic area, a play park, car parking and toilet facilities in Slieve Gullion Forest Park in partnership with Newry and Mourne District Council.
- Development of facilities in Gosford Forest Park in partnership with Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, including a network of cycle trails, walking trails, a picnic area, a play park, parking facilities and enhanced camping facilities.
- Development of fishing stands in the fishery situated in Loughgall Forest and Country Park, in partnership with Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and NI Water, bringing the total number of stands to 100.

## **Scoping Topics**

Forestry planning opportunities are presented under 11 scoping topics which are intended to reflect the various areas of interest to stakeholders, these are as follows:

- Enhancing Landscapes
- Protecting Rivers and Lakes
- Enabling the Enjoyment of Forests by Local People and Visitors
- Promoting Afforestation and Sustainable Forestry
- Supplying Sustainable Wood Products
- Regenerating Forest Land
- Growing Trees Sustainably
- Minimising the Use of Pesticides and Fertilisers
- Targeting Invasive Species
- Protecting Habitats and Species
- Restoring Peatland Habitats

## **Appendices**

A summary of the composition of Forest Service forests is provided in [Appendix I](#). Details of environmental regulation requirements, designated areas, and historic monuments are provided in [Appendix II](#). Forest Service's strategy for restoring peatland habitats is provided in [Appendix III](#).

Map 1 - Forests and woodland within Armagh Forestry Planning Area (FPA)

