



S T A F F O R D
B O R O U G H C O U N C I L

tree *strategy*

A Tree Strategy for the Stafford Area

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Foreword

Trees are the largest and oldest of living things, dwarfing our human size and longevity. We largely take them for granted and frequently it is not until trees are lost that their real value is appreciated.

The trees and woodland in Stafford Borough contribute significantly to the landscape and townscape; however their visual function is only a small part of the positive benefits which trees bring to our environment. For example, trees help to provide good air quality by absorbing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and they filter out pollution by trapping particulates.

Trees provide us with shade during hot summer days and even retain the days warmth under their canopy into the evening.

Trees and woodland provide an important educational and recreational resource, and are invaluable for wildlife, providing a habitat for thousands of plant and animal species.

Trees within an urban environment also encourage wildlife into the area.

The Government has stated that it would like to see a significant increase in woodland cover in England over the next half century. This strategy is directed to doubling tree cover in the Stafford Borough area. To succeed, it is vital that the activities and resources of all those involved in tree and woodland planting are working together, and this strategy provides the fundamental framework for the future.

Local community involvement in the planting and subsequent after-care will be a key element of implementation for success in the long term. We all have a vested interest in improving our local environment which will have a positive effect on the economy by making the Borough more attractive to new investment, but overall a better place to live and work.



Judy Walker
Chairman of the Tree Strategy Working Group, Stafford Borough Council.



Contents

Foreword

1.0 **Purpose of the Strategy**
Page 4-9

2.0 **Strategy for New Planting in the Borough**

A. Urban Areas
Page 10-14

B. Rural Areas
Page 15-19



Purpose of the Strategy

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the Strategy is to enhance the quantity and quality of trees and woodlands in Stafford Borough, particularly in urban and urban fringe areas. Although creating new planting is essential to the success of the strategy; no less important is the careful maintenance and management of existing trees and woodland. A central task will be to recognise and to promote the value of existing trees and woodland, and to encourage further planting of value to the landscape, natural history, education and recreation. Achieving the aims of the strategy will depend upon:-

- Developing a strategic approach to new planting, maintenance and management.
- Increasing popular support and public involvement, so fostering positive public attitudes towards trees.
- Involving local people in all aspects of planting and maintenance, including the location and choice of trees.
- Gaining the support of key organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors.
- Promoting good technical practice by both public and private organisations.
- Focusing the activities and resources of all those involved in tree and woodland planting.



1.2 Why Trees are Important

Trees are an important element in sustaining life within Stafford Borough. Increasing the scale of tree and woodland cover can improve the quality of life of residents and visitors. Also trees are an important element in the image of Stafford Borough, helping to boost the local economy by increasing the attractiveness of our urban areas to new businesses. Trees can also provide us with a sense of scale and bring large buildings into perspective. Potential benefits include:-

- Helping to reduce the increase in global warming by the absorption of carbon dioxide.
- Helping to provide good air quality particularly through the filtering out of pollution through the conversion of carbon dioxide to oxygen and trapping particulates.
- The improvement of aesthetic and landscape quality including the provision of improved surroundings for leisure and recreation.
- Helping to sustain and expand habitats to provide a broad and diverse wildlife base (particularly if native species are planted).
- Reinforcement of local character, distinctiveness and sense of place.
- Providing an educational and recreational resource.
- Careful planting and management can also reduce heating costs by absorbing winds and retaining warmth within the canopy during summer periods.
- Providing a psychological and uplifting experience for people who come into contact with the trees giving increased public optimism and confidence.



- Enhancement of land and property values.
- Providing shelter and helping in the conservation of energy.
- Providing farmers and landowners with a potential investment.
- Providing a locally - based economic activity turning wood into products.
- Providing a sustainable source of energy.

Potential Benefits of Producing a Tree Strategy

- 1.3 Improved communication with other agencies, the public, developers and others concerned with trees in the Borough. This leads to increased awareness of the various factors affecting trees and their management, and hence greater support is attained.
- 1.4 If the strategy leads to pro-active and planned management, the Borough Council is likely to receive fewer complaints and more positive feedback from the public.
- 1.5 Detailed surveys, (if carried out as part of the strategy) allow a closer control of work and resources, resulting in cheaper/and or higher quality management.
- 1.6 Improved access to funds and resources, including private sponsorship.
- 1.7 A clear identification of the management issues and problems affecting the trees in the Borough, and priorities for action.
- 1.8 The provision of consistent, clearly recognised and publicly supported guidelines for the long term management of trees and woodland.



The National Context and Local Agenda 21

1.9 The 1990 Environmental White Paper “This Common Inheritance” and its 1994 Sustainable Development Strategy, endorse the important and varied contribution of trees and woodlands in the urban environment. In particular, Local Authorities have been encouraged to develop long term strategies for the management and care of trees in their ownership.

1.10 These strategies should plan for the eventual replacement of old trees; enable authorities to take advantage of new opportunities for tree planting provided by other urban improvement measures, and integrate awareness of the contribution which trees can make to the quality of life in urban areas into the full range of Local Authorities activities. The implementation of a tree strategy by the Borough Council would, therefore, contribute to the U.K. Local Government Declaration on Sustainable Development.

1.11 At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 the “Earth Summit” adopted the “Statement of Forest Principles”, the first global consensus on the management of the world’s forests.

1.12 An action plan was subsequently published, “Sustainable Forestry: the U.K. Programme 1994” which sets out how the U.K. will meet its obligations on forest management. The document pulls together the various strands of forestry policy and programmes, taking into account the international principles and guidelines to which it is committed.

1.13 A Local Agenda 21 for Staffordshire produced by the Staffordshire Environment forum was launched in July 1996. Trees and woodlands are referred to in the action programme, with various targets set out.

1.14 The Rural White Paper “Rural England: A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside” published in 1995, recognises the enormous value of trees and woodland including their contribution towards the rural economy. The Government states that it would like to see a significant increase in woodland cover in England over the next half century.

Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands

1.15 The Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11) produced in 1995, further endorses support for forestry initiatives and urban tree planting. It is advised that forestry initiatives have an important role in improving degraded landscapes, assisting diversification in rural areas, and providing opportunities for sport and recreation. The important role of trees in enhancing the environment of urban areas is also recognised in the guidance; including woodland planting around development sites. It is stated that “Local Authorities should continue to work with the Black Country (now National) Urban Forestry Unit to extend tree cover in urban areas”.

Structure Plan and Local Plan Policies

1.16 The current policy position in relation to trees and woodland as set out in the Staffordshire Structure Plan 1986-2001; the Deposit Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001 (September 1993); and the subsequent Suggested Changes to the Policies and Proposals of the Deposit Local Plan (August 1994) are contained in Appendix A of this document.

1.17 The Tree Strategy is prepared within this context and can fulfil an important role in the local planning process as it contains more detail on issues relating to trees than is possible in a local plan.

Regulations and Codes of Practice in Relation to Works to Trees

1.18 There are various current regulations and Codes of Practice in relation to works to trees some of which the Borough Council has already adopted. Examples of these are:-

- The British Standards Recommendations: BS3998 “Trees Works” 1989; and BS5837 “Trees in Relation to Construction” 1991
- The National Joint Utilities Group: “Guidelines for the Planning, Installation and Maintenance of Utility Services in Proximity to Trees” April 1995.

(The NJUG guidelines were produced in response to concern expressed about the damage to tree roots by the trenching operations of the cable communication and other utility companies; and about the long term effects on the health and stability of the trees).

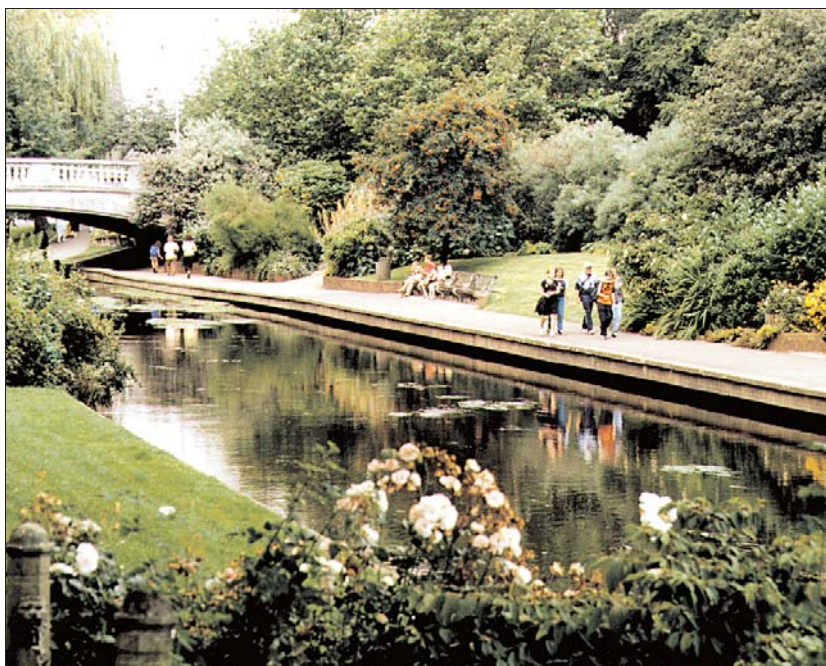
Tree Preservation

1.19 As the Local Planning Authority, the Borough Council has a statutory responsibility to take steps to protect trees which it considers makes an important contribution to the amenity of the area. Accordingly, under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the Council has powers to make and enforce Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) and designate Conservation Areas (CA's) within which all established trees are protected.

1.20 There are currently in excess of 260 Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) which apply to the Stafford Borough area. The total number of trees included in Orders runs into several thousands. A good proportion of these orders were made prior to Local Government re-organisation in 1974 and a number are more than 30 or 40, years old.

1.21 Review and re-survey of the existing TPOs would have significant resource implications. The Borough Council currently employs a qualified arboriculturalist and is soon to begin resurveying old TPO's.

1.22 The making of new TPOs has been scaled down by the Borough Council in recent years due to the high costs of making and administering such Orders. However ongoing consideration will need to be given to the issue of making new TPO's if a strategy is to be pursued which places particular emphasis on the retention of existing trees.



Strategy for New Planting in the Borough

2.1 The overall aim of the Tree Strategy is to achieve a doubling of tree cover in the Borough, and a target of 12% cover has been set in the long term. The strategy considers the approach to be taken in both the urban and the rural parts of the Borough, and addresses the issues of the maintenance and replacement of existing trees and woodlands, plus of course the planting of additional trees. In some areas it may be more appropriate to encourage new woodland from natural regeneration by creating the optimum conditions for seeds to germinate and thrive. Whilst the overall aim is to achieve an increase in tree cover, the strategy is considered more likely to be successful if it is based on a series of Action Plans which focus on particular themes. It is also recognised that there may be constraints as well as opportunities to planting in certain areas; for example sites supporting semi-natural habitats such as grasslands, wetland and heathland can be damaged by tree planting.

A. Urban Areas

2.2 The potential areas of focus in the urban areas include:-

- Parks, schools and recreational open space.
- Street trees.
- Garden trees in private ownership.
- Trees on public open space and other land owned by the Borough Council.
- Underused/derelict land.
- Industrial and commercial land e.g. non-operational land around factories.
- “Green Network” areas.
- Road and rail corridors.
- River Valleys.



Parks, Schools and Recreational Open Space

2.3 Areas of park land, school playing fields and other areas of recreational open space, offer the potential for additional planting with the benefits of providing a more diverse and sheltered landscape. Planting in these areas could also serve an educational function, and school children in particular could be encouraged to help plant and manage woodland.

2.4 Stafford Common is one example of such an area which could benefit from further planting in order to create diversity and shelter, whilst maintaining its basic open character.

Street Trees

2.5 Most street trees stand within the Highway and are the responsibility of the County Council although the Borough Council has an agency arrangement in Stafford town. Because these trees were generally planted at the same time there is a need to consider a programme for phased replacement to avoid the need for wider scale felling and to provide a more natural succession. Management practices also need consideration in new planting. This would ensure that there is continuous tree cover of some form and that the street scene will not be bare after the loss of old trees.



Garden Trees

2.6 Collectively, the trees in residential areas make a significant contribution to the “urban forest”. Within Stafford, the Rowley Park and Radford Bank areas are examples of well wooded neighbourhoods, with an attractive leafy aspect. Trees in residential areas improve the appearance of the neighbourhood, enhance property values, improve air quality and encourage wildlife.

2.7 In order to achieve the maintenance, replacement and carrying out of additional planting in residential areas, it is important to encourage local residents to plant trees in their gardens and to foster a caring attitudes towards trees in general. Individual households can contribute by ‘adopting’ and caring for street trees in their neighbourhood, or by participating in “Tree Warden” schemes.

2.8 The enforcement of Tree Preservation Orders and securing appropriate landscaping in new development through the Development Control system, are also crucial elements in achieving the Strategy’s aims in relation to trees in residential areas.

Trees on Public Open Space and Other Land Owned by the Borough Council

2.9 The Borough Council has responsibility to manage trees within its ownership, and consideration will need to be given to the issue of formulating a policy for the phased replacement of trees. (Any formulation of such a policy would need to be preceded by a survey of the age and condition of the existing trees).

2.10 There are some individual, over-mature or “veteran” trees which can have a high nature conservation value in their own right, especially when they support dead branches or have rot holes for example. There is great merit in retaining such trees where they do not pose a significant risk.



Underused/Derelict Land

2.11 Areas of underused/derelict land provide an ideal opportunity to expand the Borough's tree cover whilst achieving positive environmental benefits and enhancing the image of the area. For example tree planting on areas of derelict land adjacent to the main West Coast Railway line would help to "green" this approach to Stafford along a major transport route.



Industrial and Commercial Land

2.12 There are areas of non-operational land around industrial premises in the Borough which could benefit from additional tree cover, and the business sector could be encouraged to make private sector land available for tree planting and to sponsor individual schemes. This in turn softens the effect of large buildings with 'hard lines' and puts such buildings into perspective



Enhancement of the Green Network

2.13 In Stafford and Stone there are extensive areas of undeveloped land that link the open countryside with the town centres. It is proposed that these areas be designated as “Green Network” in the Stafford Borough Local Plan 2001; in order to protect the visual link that the areas provide through Stafford and Stone and to safeguard their value in recreational and wildlife terms.

2.14 The areas of proposed Green Network could provide, where appropriate, a “corridor” for additional tree planting; so producing a pattern of tree cover through the towns of Stafford and Stone which is visually “linked”. Such planting could also enhance the recreational and wildlife value of the Green Network.

Road and Rail Corridors

2.15 There are some areas of land adjacent to the main road and rail routes through Stafford, which are of untidy appearance and need upgrading. Tree planting along these corridors would enhance the image of the town. There may also be opportunities for planting along routes in rural areas.

River Valleys

2.16 Flood plains would all have been wooded historically and one potential area of further planting would be along the river valleys of the Penk, the Sow and the River Trent. For example, the black poplar could be re-introduced in the Penk Valley as it has significance in conservation terms and it would reinforce the historic context of Stafford. There may also be potential along the Sow and Trent River Valleys to plant small areas of locally native species in appropriate locations.

2.17 However the potential conflicts as well as the positive benefits to planting in the river valleys must be recognised. The floodplains of the Sow, Penk and Trent and other watercourses are especially important in nature conservation terms and they host a significant number of key wildlife sites. The importance of these has been recognised by the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) for example Doxey and Tillington Marshes, Baswich Meadows, Rawbones Meadow, Doley Common, Pasturefields Salt Marsh, Mottey Meadows and Aqualate Mere.

2.18 Damage could be caused by large scale planting in areas which are of value in nature conservation terms; however small scale planting may be acceptable at some localities especially where it would provide wildlife habitat in its own right. Proposals for planting in the river valleys will therefore need to be carried out in close consultation with agencies such as English Nature and the Environment Agency.

B. Rural Areas Indicative Forestry Strategy

2.19 Staffordshire County Council prepared a Discussion Document on Staffordshire's Indicative Forestry Strategy in June 1995. This document sets out to identify differing rural landscape character in areas of Staffordshire and to establish opportunities for rural forestry expansion.

2.20 All areas of the county were scored against a variety of factors called 'weightings' by the County Council in the identification of suitable areas for increased forestry/tree cover. These weightings included:-

- Landscape - the need for more woodland
- Nature Conservation
- Landscape archaeology
- Policy considerations
- Priority areas for Community Woodland supplement payments
- Sustainability issues

2.21 The Indicative Forestry Strategy shows six potential categories of area related to suitability or non-suitability for forestry/tree planting.

2.22 The six potential categories that emerged from the analysis of the weightings were;

- Keystone area (top 45%) ie. have a potentially important role in any final schematic strategy map.
- Conditional areas - ie. those which emerge as preferred under one or more but not all weightings.
- Restoration and maintenance areas
- Sensitive areas
- Potentially sensitive area: research required
- Urban areas



2.23 A large area of Stafford Borough is included within the top 45% keystone area as being suitable for forestry/tree planting, these areas are;

Most of the Borough to the south and south west of Stafford (although the Penk Valley area is sensitive)

A linear area from north of Stafford to Stone and then to the southern boundary of Stoke-on-Trent, following the valley of the River Trent, north of Stone.

An area of land running north westwards from the Fradswell area to the southern edge of Blythe Bridge in the north along the eastern fringe of the Borough.

Linked to this area is a region bounded in the east by Hixon, to the north by Gayton, to the west by the River Trent and to the south by Great Haywood (although parts of this area may be sensitive).

2.24 As a consultee of the Indicative Forestry Strategy Discussion Document the Borough Council has responded by welcoming and supporting the production of the document and its contribution to encouraging appropriate forestry expansion in Staffordshire.



2.25 **National Policy Issues raised by the Indicative Forestry Strategy, include;**

- The presumption against felling licences being granted by the Forestry Authority for felling woodland where the intention is to convert it to other uses, may inhibit owners from establishing woodland on former agricultural land.
- Although the planting of new woodlands could be helpful in reducing nitrogen throughput to groundwater, landowners in Nitrate Sensitive Areas entering into the Premium Arable and Grass Scheme are debarred from planting woodland under the Woodland Grant Scheme or any other scheme of grant aid.

- It is essential that proposals for new woodland planting or restocking in aesthetic landscape (ie. those that are the product of artistic design) should be informed by an understanding of their history, but there is, at present, no system of grant-aid to assist landowners in carrying out the necessary historical survey and research.

General Constraints on Forestry/Tree Planting in Rural Areas (as Taken from the Indicative Forestry Discussion Strategy Document)

2.26 The scale of new woodland planting is small in Staffordshire and also in Stafford Borough, with schemes averaging three and a half hectares. Some Farmers may be unconvinced of the commercial value of forestry as a complementary enterprise to agriculture.

2.27 Flood defence requirements may place a constraint on the planting of new woodlands on some floodplain areas; such floodplains include the Penk and the Sow in Stafford.

2.28 Lack of appropriate management can threaten the survival of a large proportion of the county's ancient semi-natural woodland.

2.29 An expansion of forestry in the county can only be justified if it can be shown to be a sustainable land use. Unless potential problems associated with the deposition of atmospheric ammonia, and with threats to plantations from deer and grey squirrels, can be alleviated, such expansion may fail the test of sustainability in some areas.

Further Research

2.30 Further research into the current stock of rural trees/copses and woodlands in Stafford Borough to assess what stock of trees and woodland are already in existence would be helpful but costly.

2.31 The main categories of woodland comprise:-

- (a) Ancient Woodland.
- (b) Recent Secondary Woodland.
- (c) Semi-natural Woodland.
- (d) Replanted Woodland.

A definition of these categories of woodland is set out in Appendix B.

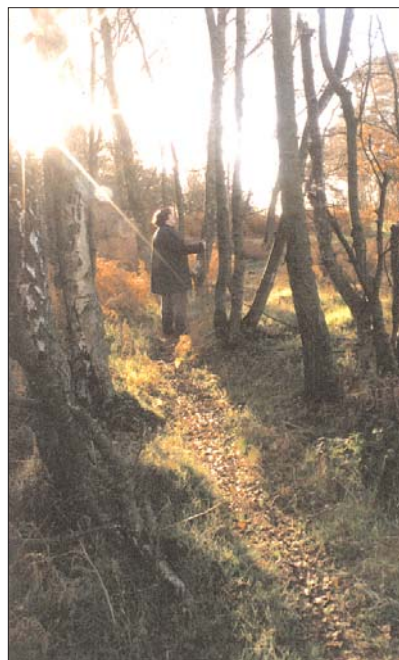
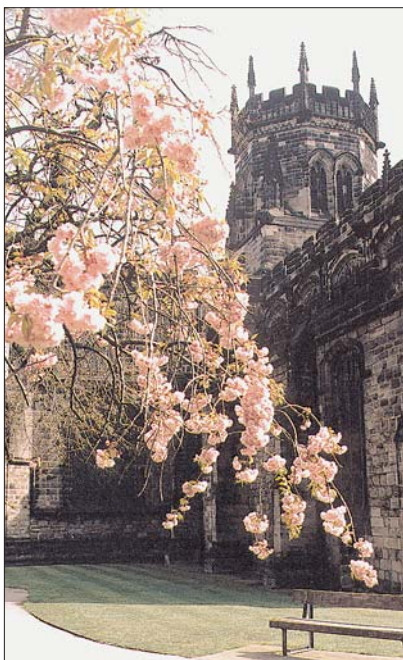
2.32 The Borough Council is carrying out a Biological Survey in partnership with the Staffordshire Nature Conservation Working Party to ascertain sites of nature conservation importance. This will help to ensure that proposals for new woodland planting will not adversely affect their interests.

Implementation and Monitoring

3.1 The production of a tree strategy for the Borough needs to be backed up by a series of Action Plans which identify the areas of activity involved for both the Borough council and third parties. Each different set of circumstances is likely to involve a different combination of agencies, drawn from the Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, private landowners and developers, private companies and public bodies (for example the Environment Agency), through to voluntary organisations, community groups and individuals.

3.2 In the urban areas of the Borough, possible problems to be encountered include hostile ground conditions, and the proximity of people (problems of vandalism etc). Fostering a caring attitude towards trees and increasing awareness of their significance is an integral element of the strategy. The value and attractiveness of trees and woodland will need to be 'marketed' to the general public. This could be done by involving people directly in tree and woodland planting and management; and in other projects and campaigns. Targeting schools is a good way of involving and educating people at a young age and encouraging them to appreciate the positive benefits of trees and to care for them in their local environment.

3.3 Subsequent maintenance of new planting schemes will be a crucial issue to consider; as will the monitoring of their success. The value of new woodland should not be measured solely by the number of trees planted, but by their effect on that particular location, the value of the species used and the wildlife habitats created.



Resource Implications and Priorities

4.1 The preparation and implementation of a tree strategy has significant resource implications, and its success will depend on the support of many other organisations and individuals. The Borough Council is unlikely to have sufficient resources available to be the sole funder in carrying out this project.

4.2 However, although there is likely to be significant scope for increasing tree and woodland cover throughout many parts of the Borough, it is important to give priority to those areas where resources are most likely to be available and where the effects of additional planting will be of most benefit initially.

4.3 In order to prepare a strategy for future planting in the Borough, there is a need to establish a database of land availability, ownership and existing tree and woodland cover in the Borough, and this in itself has significant resource implications.



Useful Links

Sources of Grant Aid and Advice Which May be Available for Forestry/Tree Planting and Management

- *Private Businesses:- e.g. sponsoring trees and or woodland,*
- *Private individuals/families/groups as above,*
- *Stafford Borough Council:- Some funding,*
- *Staffordshire County Council:- Advice and some funding,*
- *The Forestry Authority:- e.g. Woodland Grant Scheme,*
- *English Nature:- Advice, especially in relation to ancient woodland (EN produce an Ancient Woodland Inventory)*
- *Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food:- Farm Woodland Premium Scheme - encourages the planting of new woods on land currently in productive agriculture.*
- *Countryside Commission:- Area specific grants; usually administered via County Council,*
- *Council for the Protection of Rural England.*
- *U.K. 2000:- 30% grant for projects having an environmental focus involving volunteers and demonstrating community need,*
- *Worldwide Fund for Nature:- Supports a wide range of conservation grants throughout Britain,*
- *Colonel Sanders Environmental Awards:- 'Environmental Awards'; available to local authorities voluntary groups, school and youth groups for environmental projects, which may include tree planting,*
- *Staffordshire Rural Action for the Environment:- Grants to cover up to half the cost of community based projects (max. £2,000),*
- *Shell Better Britain Campaign:- 'Project Grant Fund'; grants available to assist voluntary groups with practical needs i.e. purchase of tools, plant and materials,*
- *The Tree Council:- Charitable organisation with limited funds to assist planned tree projects with public access,*
- *Country Landowners Association,*
- *Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group:- Advice and information,*
- *Woodland Trust:- Charitable Organisation that purchases and maintains woodlands and who undertake new woodland planting,*
- *British Trust for Conservation Volunteers:- Volunteers to undertake conservation work,*
- *Staffordshire Wildlife Trust:- Advice about wildlife in Staffordshire.*

