

User Guide

December 2022

Woodland Opportunity Mapping for Sussex and the South Downs National Park

Photo credit: Sam Moore



Purpose

Sussex Nature Partnership, Woodland Trust and South Downs National Park Authority have collaborated to produce a Woodland Opportunity Map for Sussex and the areas of the South Downs National Park in Hampshire.

This is a GIS based tool to help farmers, landowners and managers with initial guidance on identifying sites suitable for woodland creation in Sussex and South Downs National Park. It uses a methodology applied in other sensitive landscapes, such as Nidderdale AONB and Yorkshire Dales National Park.

It can be viewed [here](#) as a story map.

Creating woodland on your land can provide opportunities for diversification of your farm or estate. It can help to combat climate change and can create important new habitats for biodiversity and thus support ‘nature’s recovery’. It can also help to deliver other ‘nature-based solutions’ such as slowing the flow of water in the landscape thus reducing local flood risk and improving water quality.

This map-based tool will help to better understand where woodland creation can be located where this will deliver environmental benefits but will also protect other features of importance in our landscape such as cultural heritage, archaeology, other habitat types and designated wildlife sites.

“The right tree in the right place for the right reason”

It provides a high-level indication of suitability which **does not include all factors for consideration** and so must be followed by scrutiny of a more complete set of information. But it will act as a useful first screening of where opportunities for woodland creation in this area of the South-East are most likely to occur and where extra care may be needed to understand sensitivities of a site during project planning and design.

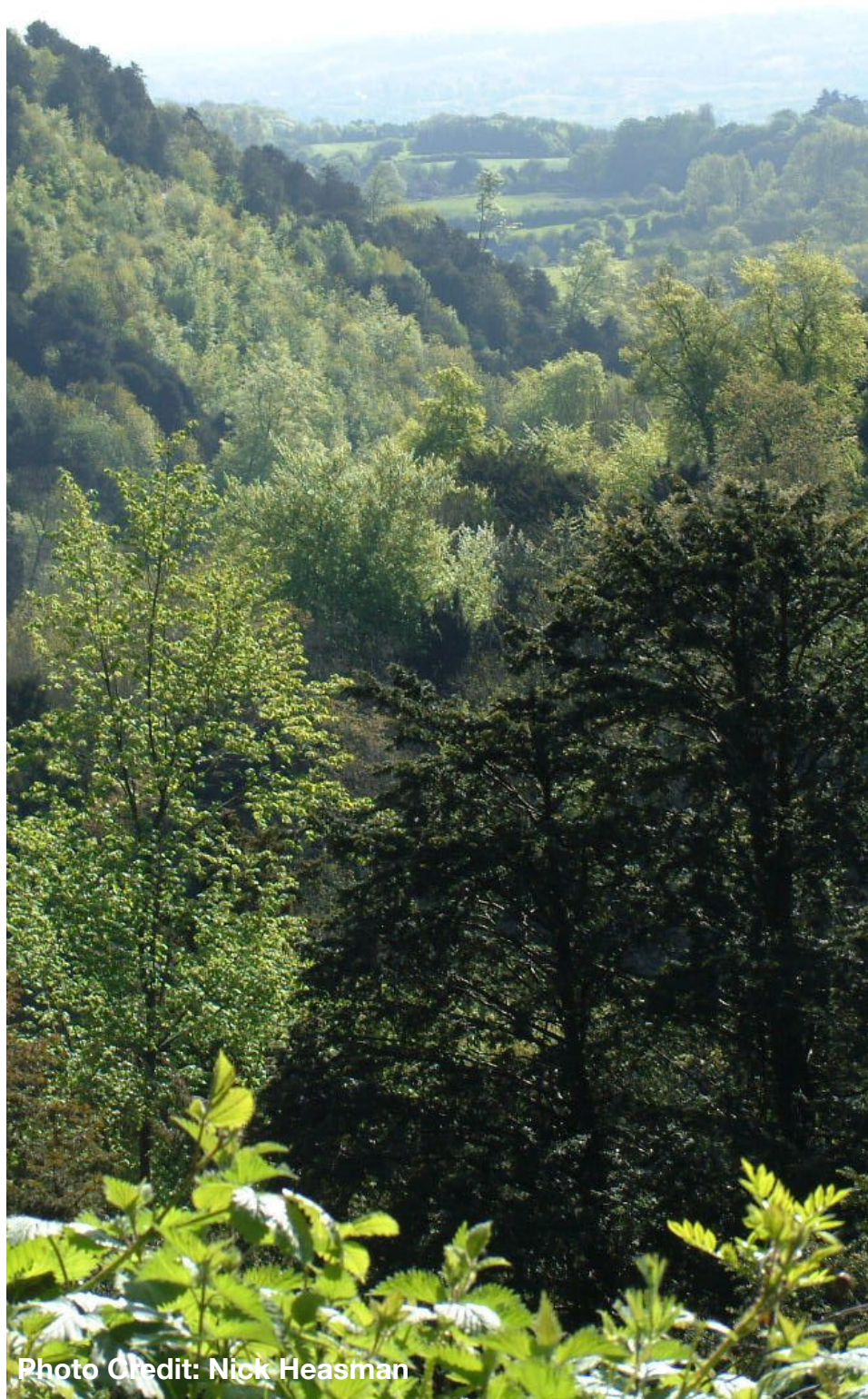


Photo Credit: Nick Heasman

What it does

This tool brings together a range of datasets for Sussex and the South Downs National Park and ‘weights’ these depending on whether they indicate positive benefits from woodland creation or negative impacts on other features that may be present on a site, such as habitats, archaeology and so on.

The weighted data is used to create a combined layer which brings the positive and negative weightings together to provide an overall score.

Where woodland creation would be incompatible with other factors (e.g. presence of priority habitats or scheduled Ancient Monuments) - these areas are excluded as ‘constraint areas’ unsuitable for woodland creation.

An overall negative score indicates areas where woodland creation is unlikely to be appropriate based on a high level of sensitivity.

An overall positive score indicates opportunity areas where woodland creation is likely to be suitable - although some sensitivity may still be present which

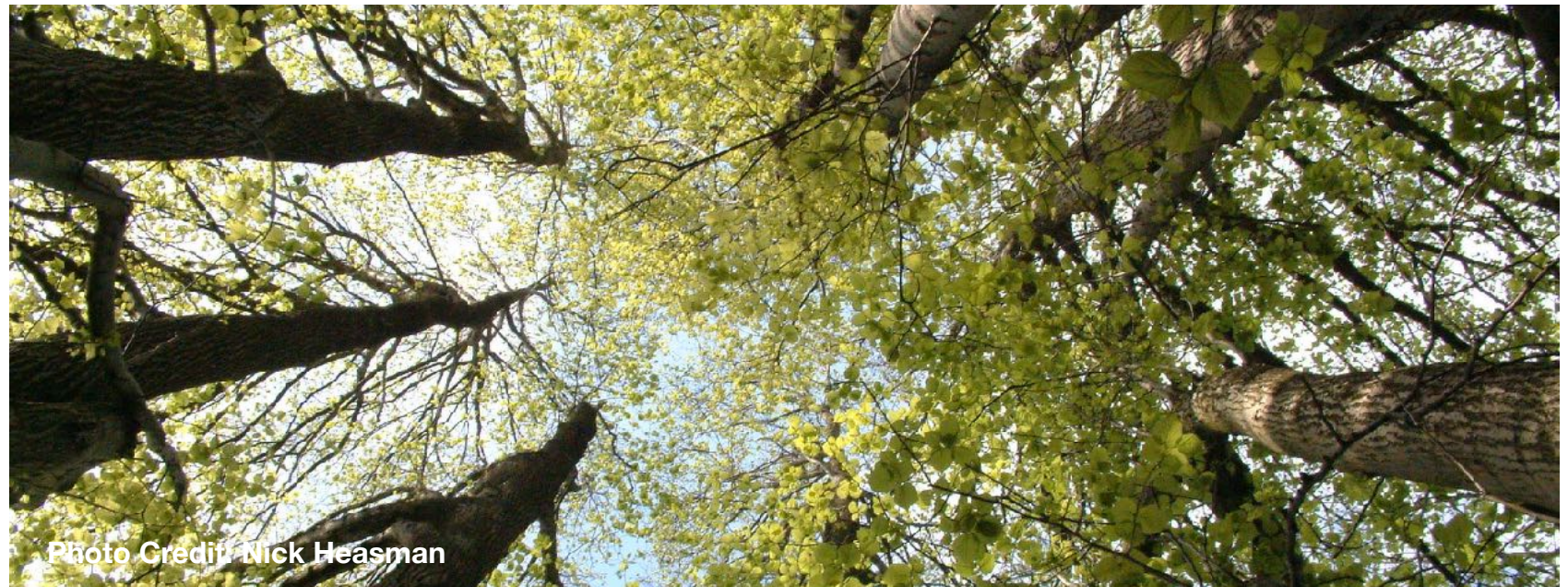


Photo Credit: Nick Heasman

will need to be understood and addressed through project planning and design. Two levels of sensitivity are included in the final map: **sensitive** and **less sensitive** to help flag areas where there are more factors present which may be affected by woodland creation.

In principle, the greater the sensitivity of a place to woodland creation, the more care should be taken to understand the specific characteristics of the site and design the woodland creation project to take consideration of these.

A list of the data used in production of this tool and how it is weighted is provided in Appendix A. More information on precise weightings and methodology can be found in the technical report which accompanies this guide.

Limitations

This tool has been based on best available information but it has limitations and by its very nature cannot accurately represent all the characteristics of a place at the site level. For example, it does not consider landscape character and does not include all archaeological records.

Therefore, in all cases additional information gathering and site survey must be used to verify whether a site is suitable for woodland creation. More information on critical additional information to include in this process is included in the following sections.

The tool excludes all built up areas and so is not relevant for identifying sites suitable for urban tree planting projects.

Woodland Opportunity Map

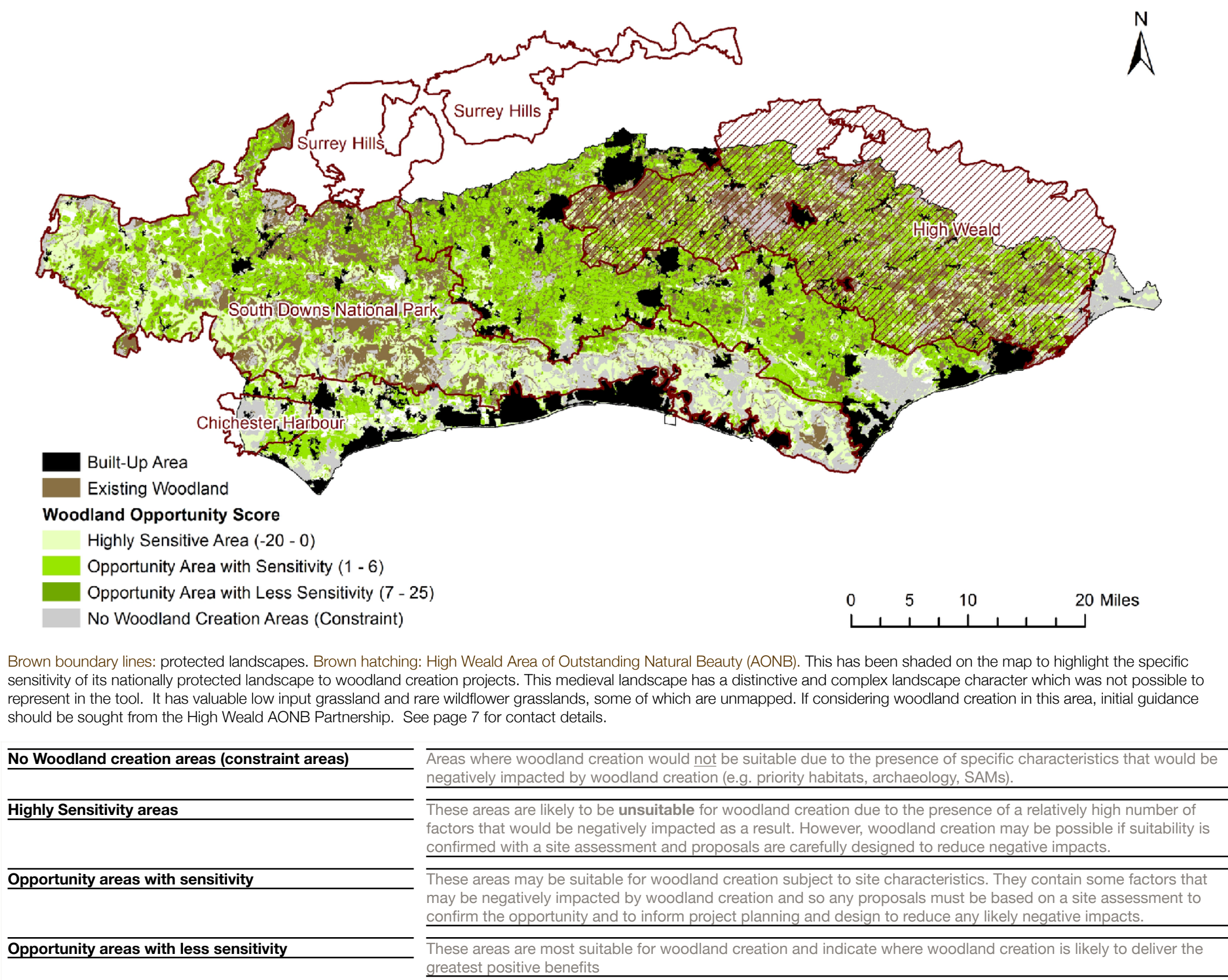


Figure 1: Woodland Opportunity Map for Sussex and areas of South Downs National Park within Hampshire

How to use the tool

The woodland opportunity map will give you an initial and very broad indication as to whether a site could have potential for woodland creation. If it does, regardless of level of sensitivity, additional steps will then be needed to develop a woodland creation project that complies with Forestry Commission requirements. This is in part due to the limitations of the tool and the data it hasn't included (see Box 1 below) but more importantly it relates to the need to understand a site in detail which is not possible with an indicative mapping tool of this type.

In all cases the following should be carried out:

- **Additional desk-based analysis of data available for the proposed site.** This will include information not included in the woodland opportunity map such as: landscape character, all archaeological records for the site, presence of utilities infrastructure and other site characteristics (soil type, slope etc). It will also be necessary to confirm other information at the site level such as detailed ecological interest of the site (confirmation of habitats and species present and its possible interest for 'nature recovery' as set out in Local Nature Recovery Strategies and/or Nature Recovery Plans for South Downs National Park or relevant AONB).
- **A detailed site assessment:** This will be needed to confirm the presence of any important features and determine suitability for woodland creation. Information from a site assessment will also help to inform the project plans required for project approval (landscape context plan, site appraisal plan, design concept plan and final woodland creation design plan).

The Forestry Commission oversees the regulation of woodland creation projects in England. A core principle within the regulatory process is that all woodland creation projects must "fit with the landscape and accommodate features of interest". All projects must follow government guidelines to ensure that they comply with the UK Forestry Standard.

For more information on the government requirements for woodland creation projects, see the guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-planting-and-woodland-creation-overview>

Financial assistance is available from the government to support consideration of the various factors needed when planning a woodland creation project. This is available through the "Woodland Creation Planning Grant" <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/woodland-creation-planning-grant>.

Please note: SDNPA, WT and Sussex Nature Partnership will ground truth and refine this tool over the next six months and would appreciate any feedback on its accuracy and usefulness (contact SussexLNPSec@eastsussex.gov.uk).

Box 1: Key information sets omitted from the tool

This tool does not include some key information that is relevant at the site level and must be checked before assuming opportunity for woodland creation.

- **Landscape character.** It was not possible to include an indicator of impact on local landscape character in this type of tool. This will need to be checked separately. Within the national park and AONBs, these authorities can provide information on how to go about this. Outside these areas, the advisers listed at the end of the document can point you to the best sources of information on this.
- **Archaeology.** This tool does include all Scheduled Monuments and Battlefields (as 'no woodland creation areas') and uses Archaeological Notification Areas as areas of sensitivity. However it does not include any archaeological point data and so all sites must be checked for specific archaeological features or records. Contact County Councils (or Chichester District for that area) for information on how to access archaeological data for your site from the Historic Environment Record.
- Detailed information on **habitats and species.** Priority habitats have been included in this tool. Priority habitats other than woodland are indicated as 'no woodland creation areas' in order to protect them. But in all cases it is still advisable to confirm the habitats and species present on and around the proposed site. This will help to ensure that any woodland creation is located and designed in manner that is compatible with existing habitats or wider nature recovery needs in the area. Contact [Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre](#) or the [Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre](#) for guidance on the habitats and species data available for your area.
- **Benefits to people (access and recreation).** If woodland is created close to settlements and communities it can provide opportunities for recreation and connection to nature. This type of benefit has not been included in this tool and should be considered in each application.

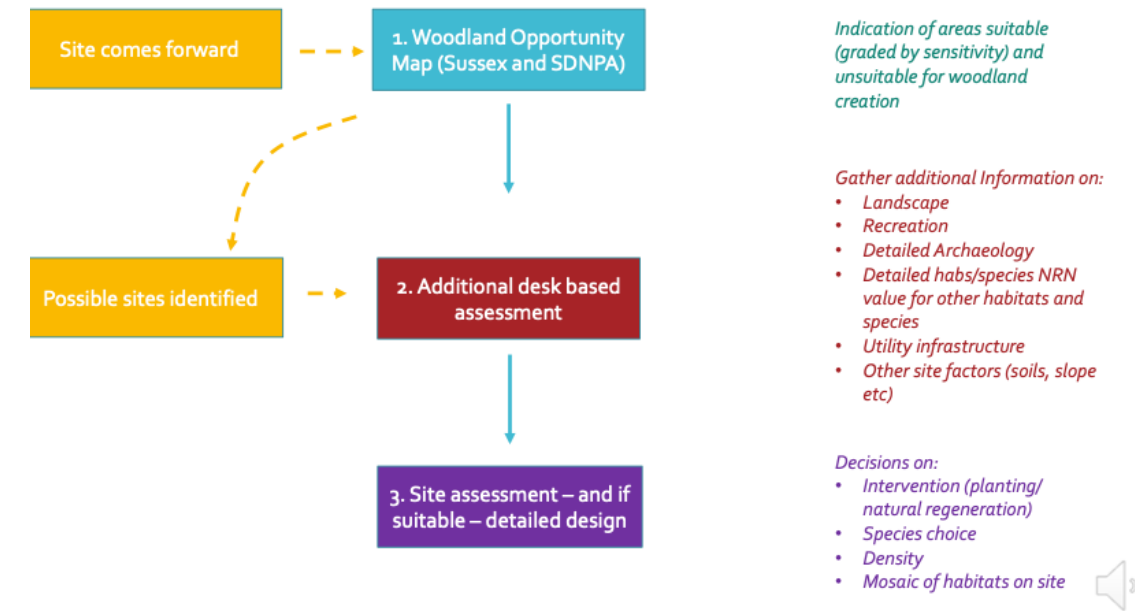


Figure 2: Woodland Opportunity Mapping as an early step in planning a woodland creation project

- Impact on **utility infrastructure.** This was not considered in the tool but should be checked with utility companies.
- **Individual and specimen trees.** Some Tree Preservation Order (TPO) data has been included in the tool but it was not possible to acquire a complete data set for the whole area. Therefore presence of TPOs should be investigated on the proposed site. Your local planning authority can help you with this information.





Additional Guidance: High Weald AONB

High Weald AONB has been shaded on the map to highlight the specific sensitivity of its nationally protected landscape to woodland creation projects. This medieval landscape has a distinctive and complex landscape character which was not possible to represent in the tool. It has valuable low input grassland and rare wildflower grasslands, some of which are unmapped. If considering woodland creation in this area, initial guidance should be sought from the High Weald AONB Partnership (see contact details below).

Who to contact for assistance

If you would like more information on whether a site is suitable for woodland creation or guidance on how to bring forward a woodland creation project, a range of organisations can be contacted for advice:

- Within South Downs National Park contact the South Downs National Park naturerecovery@southdowns.gov.uk
- Within High Weald AONB contact High Weald AONB Partnership info@highweald.org Tel. 01424 723011 and see “Tree establishment in the High Weald” for guidance (<https://www.highweald.org/look-after/tree-establishment.html>)
- Within Chichester Harbour AONB contact the Chichester Harbour Conservancy info@conservancy.co.uk
- Woodland Trust (across Sussex and Hampshire) woodlandoutreachenglandsoutheast@woodlandtrust.org.uk
- Forestry Commission. Contact Local Woodland Officer in your area. For list of areas offices see <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission/about/access-and-opening#Woodland-Creation-Officer> and interactive map https://data-forestry.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/1c565f159baa4c9e94e1d5520b68afc6_0/explore?location=50.927156%2C0.145878%2C8.35
- Natural England Tree Action Plan Advisory Service (Sussex/Kent). NE are offering a free consultation and advice service for woodland creation proposals and encourage applicants to consult with them as early as possible. They have a dedicated team of advisers across the country who can give advice and act as an interface between woodland creation applicants and other relevant Natural England Teams. Please contact your local adviser via woodlandcreation@naturalengland.org.uk

Appendix A: Data used to create the tool

The tables below provide an overview of the data used to build this tool. For more information and rationale for each dataset see the technical report which accompanies this guide.

Factors indicating unsuitability for woodland creation (constraints)

Category	Data type
Biodiversity	Extent of Priority habitats (Priority habitat inventory)
	Extent of Natural England Habitat Network: Existing Habitat (primary habitat, associated habitat, areas of habitat creation). All habitat types excluding woodland.
Environmental Limits	Built up areas
	Roads
	Peat Soils
Heritage	Battlefields
	Scheduled Ancient Monuments
	World Heritage Sites
	Local Geological Sites
Tree Cover	15m buffer to Tree Preservation Orders
	Areas of existing woodland (woodland already present)
Water quality and Quantity	River network
	15 m buffer to lakes and ponds

Criteria assigned a negative weighting (which indicates sensitivity and/or constraint to woodland creation)

Category	Data Type
Biodiversity	Local Wildlife Sites
	Other designations (SPAs, SACs, SSSIs, NNRs)
	SSSI Impact Risk Zones
	Grassland within woodland
	NE Habitat Networks: restorable habitat (all habitats types excluding woodland)
	NE Habitat Networks: enhancement zone 1(all habitat types excluding woodland)
Heritage	Extent of Archaeological Notification Areas (ANAs)/ Archaeological Alert Areas
Tree Cover	Wood Pasture and Parkland
	Traditional Orchards
	Existing Conifer Woodland
	Existing Mixed Woodland
Water Quality and Quantity	15-50m buffer to Tree Preservation Orders
	Source protection zones (inner, outer and total)
	Land in higher level stewardship scheme (implies existing administrative barriers to new projects)

A range of weightings is used between -5 to -1. The decision on weighting was made through input from stakeholders. See technical report for more information.

Criteria that are assigned a positive weighting - which indicates opportunity for / benefit from woodland creation

Category	Data Type
Environmental Quality	50m buffer to A roads
Tree Cover	Areas of windblown/felled trees
	50m buffer to ancient woodland
	150m buffer to existing woodland
	350m buffer to existing woodland (the wider buffer is given a less poise weighting than the narrower one to indicate greater benefit from expansion of woodland close to existing woodland edge)
	150m buffer to woodland Local Wildlife Site
Water Quality and Quantity	Flood risk. Working with natural processes: areas for planting: woodland creation across a catchment
	Flood Risk. Working with natural processes: areas suitable for planting: riparian areas
	Flood risk: Working with natural processes: areas suitable for planting: flood plain.

A range of weightings is used between +1 to +5. The decision on weighting was made through input from stakeholders. See technical report for more information.

Useful References

Forestry Commission. Designing new woodland: Woodland Creation Planning Grant. Support to design new UKFS compliant woodland. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/woodland-creation-planning-grant>

Forestry Commission (2017). The UK Forestry Standard. The government's approach to sustainable forestry. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687147/The_UK_Forestry_Standard.pdf

High Weald AONB Partnership. Tree establishment in the High Weald <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/tree-establishment.html>

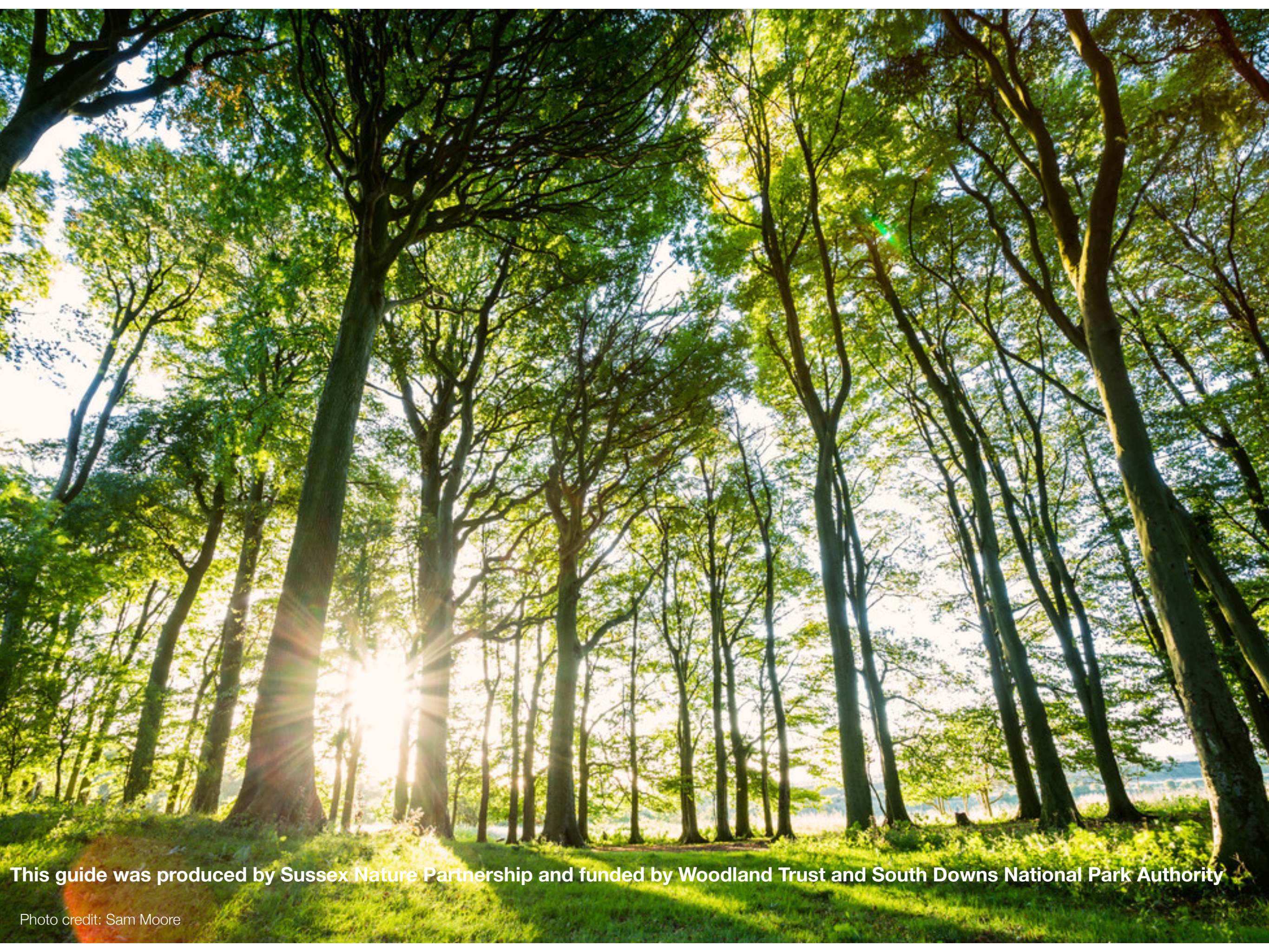
HM Government. Tree planting and woodland creation: overview. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-planting-and-woodland-creation-overview>

South Downs National Park Authority. Woodland Creation/ tree planting site <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/nature-recovery-information-for-delivery-partners/call-for-nature-sites/call-for-nature-sites-faqs/mechanisms/woodland-creation-tree-planting-site/>

Nidderdale AONB (2020). Woodland Opportunity Plan. <https://nidderdaleaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Woodland-Opportunity-Plan-FINALWEB.pdf>

Woodland Trust (2022) Woodland Creation Guide. <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/50673/woodland-trust-woodland-creation-guide.pdf>

Yorkshire Dales National Park. Woodland Opportunity Map. <https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/park-authority/living-and-working/trees-and-woodlands/woodland-opportunities-map/>



This guide was produced by Sussex Nature Partnership and funded by Woodland Trust and South Downs National Park Authority

Photo credit: Sam Moore