



Craig Whittaker MP

CALDER VALLEY

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Response to Ancient woodland – March 2017

Thank you for contacting me about ancient woodland.

I agree with you that ancient woodland is a precious habitat, and would note that the National Planning Policy Framework already contains protections for it. It states that planning permission should be refused for development that would result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees elsewhere. This can only be overridden if the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss.

The recent Housing White Paper went further, announcing a proposal to clarify planning policy on ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees, upgrading their protection to the same level as the green belt. I have been assured that Ministers will consider everyone's views and develop this further.

I am aware of press coverage suggesting that proposals for a national biodiversity offsetting system could undermine the existing protections, but this has never been the case. Biodiversity offsetting would only be used once a planning application has passed a rigorous set of tests. It could then be used to ensure that adequate compensation was provided in a transparent and consistent way.

Ministers want to protect and enhance our woodland habitats. Over 11 million trees were planted in the last Parliament and there is a pledge to plant a further 11 million in this one. England's woodland cover is now expanding at a rate that has not been seen since the fourteenth century.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP