The Value of Trees

England was once largely tree covered, but as long as 1,000 years ago man's activities had reduced the forest to only about 15% of the land area. Today one third of England's woodland area is ancient woodland or plantations on ancient woodland sites, while veteran trees provide another important link with our woodland past.

Local authorities and non-governmental organisations own significant areas of woodland, much of it of particular conservation, landscape or recreational value, and local authorities also manage and own the majority of green spaces within built-up areas and the trees in parks and streets.

Central Government's vision for England's trees over the next 50 years is set out in their 'Strategy for England's Trees, Woodland and Forests' (2007-2020), and sets out the following aims:

- To secure trees and woodlands for future development
- Ensure resilience to climate change
- To protect and enhance natural resources
- To increase the contribution that trees woodlands and forests make to our quality of life

The Amenity Value of Trees

The word "Amenity" is derived from the Latin word "amoenus" which means "pleasant". In current usage it refers to a useful or desirable feature, but whichever way the word is interpreted, the benefits of trees are tangible and can be readily appreciated by each of the human senses, and the benefits they provide are many:

- Trees, alive or dead, are an essential habitat for insects, birds, mammals, fungi and other plants.
- They visually soften an otherwise harsh urban environment.
- Tree canopies slow up rainfall and the root systems absorb moisture and so help to reduce flash flooding.
- They mark the changing of the seasons with spring flowers, summer foliage, autumn fruit and bare winter branches.

Stress and illness levels are often lower where trees are planted, as trees provide psychological refreshment and a sense of well-being through softening the urban environment. As trees mature, they create character and a sense of place and permanence whilst releasing scents and aromas that create a positive emotional response.

As well as absorbing carbon dioxide (the main greenhouse gas) and producing oxygen; trees filter, absorb and reduce pollutant gasses including ozone, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide.

Trees work all year round for us by reducing localised extremes in temperatures – cooling in the summer and warming in the winter. Large leaf canopies catch rainfall – slowing down the water's progress from sky to ground, thus helping to reduce flash flooding, as well as helping to reduce the risk of skin cancers by providing shade from harmful ultra-violet radiation.

Community focal points, which include trees, provide amenity and aesthetic value as well as historical continuity. Our trees offer habitats for a broad range of wildlife – large and small – throughout the year. Trees also mark the changing seasons with leaf changes and floral displays.

The presence of trees can increase the value of residential and commercial property by 5%-18%, while the value of undeveloped land – which can provide mature trees – can be increased by 27%. When planted strategically they can reduce fossil fuel emissions by reducing fuel costs for heating and cooling buildings.