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New partnership brings UK woodlands back to life

A ground-breaking scheme to breathe new life into neglected UK woodlands has been developed by a partnership between two charities and DIY giant B&Q.

Sustainability charity BioRegional (1), forestry charity the Sylva Foundation (2), and B&Q (3) will support woodland owners in bringing woodlands into active management.

Their new scheme, part of B&Q's One Planet Home programme, will enhance wildlife and landscapes, help local communities to enjoy and value their woodlands, encourage the sourcing and supply of local timber from sustainable sources, and create products and jobs.

The new partnership was endorsed by government on 31 January, when Environment Secretary Owen Paterson published the formal response to the final report of the Independent Panel on Forestry. (4) The panel had called for programmes like this one to revive neglected woodlands. (5)

Sue Riddlestone, BioRegional chief executive, said: "This is the start of something big. We're teaming up to make the most of this amazing but neglected natural resource that lies all around us. We can do so much better with our woods, and in doing so we'll benefit people, the economy and wildlife."

Dr Gabriel Hemery, Sylva Foundation chief executive, said: "We are excited to be working alongside our partners in delivering a step change in the way that woodland owners can be supported in bringing woodlands back to life - for nature and for people."

The new programme will begin in the South East and East of England in its first year under four main themes: 1) Woodland revival and creation, 2) community engagement and education, 3) innovation and communication and 4) marketing of local timber.

It will aim to bring neglected woodlands into good management. This will tackle species and habitat loss, strengthen links between communities and woodland, build forestry skills, and develop markets for products from woodlands.

Ten thousand hectares of woodland will be mapped and assessed, and even more covered under a new Star Award Scheme to be developed as part of the programme to move towards active woodland management. This area is about the size of 21,428 football pitches.

More than 1,000 people will receive training and education about woodlands, and the scheme will reach out to hundreds of woodland owners. It will build on the work of existing woodland-related organisations and support them in the process.

Matt Sexton, B&Q's Director of Corporate Social Responsibility, said: "This scheme isn't just about planting trees. We believe that we can help make a real difference to the UK's woodland. We are committed to improving local woodlands for all the community to enjoy and creating sustainable local woodland jobs, skills and products.

"We have a strong heritage as a responsible retailer and as part of our ambition to make a net positive contribution, this investment marks the start of us putting back more than we take away in a very local, grass roots way."

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EDITOR'S NOTES

- 1) BioRegional is an award-winning entrepreneurial charity which establishes sustainable businesses and works with partners around the world to demonstrate that a sustainable future can be easy, attractive and affordable. We call our approach One Planet Living
- 2) The Sylva Foundation is a tree and forestry charity, working to revive Britain's wood culture (www.Sylva.org.uk). Sylva's *myForest* service (www.myForest.org.uk) supports a growing number of woodland owners across the UK (currently 680 owners, managing more than 1000 woodlands, covering 17,000 hectares), and encourages the use of home-grown wood. It has also a number of projects across programmes covering science, education and forestry, including an independent think-tank *Forestry Horizons*, the *OneOak* project and *TreeWatch*, a citizen science initiative exploring tree health (www.TreeWatch.com.)
- 3) B&Q is the leading home improvement and garden centre retailer in UK. Its parent company, Kingfisher PLC is Europe's leading home improvement retail group and the third largest in the world. Launched in 2012, Kingfisher's Net Positive strategy identifies four pillars that are

central to achieving the group's sustainability aspiration; timber, energy, innovation and communities. B&Q is supporting Net Positive through continuing to deliver its One Planet Home sustainability programme, launched in 2008. One Planet Home is governed by two priorities: to make sustainable living easy and affordable for customers and to embed sustainability into all aspects of their business. In 2011, B&Q reached a major milestone, having ensured that 100% of timber products it buys globally can be traced back to well-managed sources. Building on this success B&Q is now focussing on the UK market with the aim of creating sustainable, long-term working woodlands in the UK that will provide environmental, educational, social and economic value.

- 4) See <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/files/Independent-Panel-on-Forestry-Final-Report1.pdf>
- 5) The government's policy statement in response to the panel's final report says: "We welcome B&Q's recent initiative to help woodland owners engage with their local communities and we encourage others to do the same." See <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13871-forestry-policy-statement.pdf>