

Fears over ancient woodland with Gatwick expansion plans

Gatwick Airport will plant three trees for every one lost in nearby ancient woodland, which has been continuously wooded for more than 400 years, if its expansion plans go ahead



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The Woodland Trust is set to meet with representatives of **Gatwick** following claims the airport has published inaccurate information regarding the effect its expansion will have on ancient woodland in Surrey.

The trust has invited Gatwick Airport's commission director, Alastair McDermid, to learn more about ancient woodland by meeting members of its conservation team at Edolphs Copse, an ancient wood near the airport.

This follows the Gatwick's publication of a report which the trust believes contains a number of significant inaccuracies about ancient woodland.

The report was a summary of amendments it proposed to make following its **consultation into three proposals for a second runway**.

The Woodland Trust led a campaign to protect ancient woodland which produced 4,092 responses to the consultation, more than half the total number Gatwick

received, expressing concern about areas of woodland that would be lost or severely damaged by the plans.

Concern has been raised that these responses have not been properly considered by the airport.

Katharine Rist, **Woodland Trust**, said: "Gatwick's new proposals to deal with loss and damage to wildlife corridors and precious habitats are misguided at best.

"We hope to speak directly to the owners of Gatwick and help them understand the complex nature of ancient woodland and why best practice would actually be to avoid any loss of this irreplaceable habitat in line with the mitigation hierarchy."

Gatwick's report cites the need to offset the loss of ancient woodland and proposes to do this by planting three new trees to every one lost, which it describes as best practice.

Miss Rist continued: "Ancient woodland is not solely about trees. It is a habitat of national significance and is a unique ecosystem containing complex soil structures that have lain undisturbed for hundreds, potentially thousands, of years.

"It is crucial Gatwick fully understands what it is putting at risk.

"Both the Woodland Trust and DEFRA agree it cannot be 'offset'. Planting new woodland at three times the amount of ancient woodland lost will never result in a habitat of the same biodiversity.

A Gatwick Airport spokesperson said: "Gatwick's approach to all local environmental features is to avoid where possible and then to minimise, mitigate and compensate any impact.

"We are aware of the importance of nearby areas of ancient woodland and have worked very hard to minimise any effects on these woodland areas, basing our plans on experts' advice and industry best practice.

"While some areas will be affected, our expansion plans have been carefully designed to preserve and protect other areas of ancient woodland such as Horleyland Wood.

"We have agreed to meet with the Woodland Trust to discuss our plans further and will continue to work with all relevant authorities and wildlife trusts."

Around 2% of the UK's land area is covered in ancient woodland, which is defined as land that has been continuously wooded since at least 1600.

The Woodland Trust has further stated that they will continue to oppose any airport expansion that results in the loss of ancient woodland and to lobby for the protection of woodland around the airport.

To this end, it will be attending the GATCOM meeting in October and has expressed a hope to see Gatwick's plans improve significantly before any further consultation.