



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Blessed recognition for Northern Ireland's finest trees**

*Nominate your hero tree, now*

The Woodland Trust is urging tree lovers to stump up nominations for Northern Ireland's Tree of the Year 2017.

The competition is open to any living and loved tree in the UK; with Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales each having its own contest. Any individual, group or organisation can enter through the Woodland Trust's website until 30 July.

**Actor and Woodland Trust supporter Brian Blessed is lending his powerful voice to the contest. He**

**said:** "We want to hear about the most impressive, unusual and knobbly specimens – a bit like me!

"After all, trees are more than just a bit of greenery; they are intriguing characters that have become a beloved part of our landscape and history. They deserve to be celebrated and cherished.

"It reminds me of a Pamela Tennant poem: 'But at night do you believe they're trees? They're little old men with twisted knees!'"

Each country's winning tree will benefit from a tree care award of up to £1,000. The carefully tailored package could be used for pruning or professional advice; it could even support a community event in celebration of the tree.

Last year's competition saw 'Old Homer', a holm oak in Rostrevor's Kilbroney Park, capture hearts and minds to take the Northern Ireland crown. The charity now hopes to find a rightful successor.

**Patrick Cregg, director of the Woodland Trust in Northern Ireland, added:** "Tree of the Year brings a wonderful opportunity for individuals and communities to nominate and share their best-loved trees. We're looking for a tree with a story, legend, historical significance, or one which is a local landmark. Our aim is to draw attention to our country's amazing trees, giving them the recognition they deserve.

"Earlier this year, the UK Government recommended changes to national planning policy which specifically put 'aged and veteran trees' – and ancient woodland – on par with other protected

habitats, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We will be calling for the same protection to be afforded to Northern Ireland's ancient trees and woods."

An independent panel of experts in each of the four countries will choose a shortlist from the entries submitted, and the winners will be decided by public vote later in the year.

For more information about the competition and to submit your nomination visit [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/treeoftheyear](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/treeoftheyear)

## Ends

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**The Woodland Trust** is the largest woodland conservation charity in the UK. It has over 500,000 supporters. It wants to see a UK rich in native woods and trees, for people and wildlife.

The Trust has three key aims:

- i) to protect ancient woodland, which is rare, unique and irreplaceable
- ii) to restore damaged ancient woodland, bringing precious pieces of our natural history back to life
- iii) to plant native trees and woods with the aim of creating resilient landscapes for people and wildlife.

Established in 1972, the Woodland Trust now has over 1,000 sites in its care covering over 22,500 hectares. Access to its woods is free. Further news can be found at [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)

Here in Northern Ireland the Woodland Trust cares for 50 woods. These woods contain a mix of recently planted woodland, mature woodland and ancient woodland. The Trust has produced the first-ever comprehensive record of Northern Ireland's ancient woodland; find out more at [www.backonthemap.org.uk](http://www.backonthemap.org.uk)