

Forestry in a post-Brexit

“It is really important that we look at change as an opportunity, not just a challenge” says Confor chief executive Stuart Goddall

Confor has consulted the forestry and wood-processing sector in the aftermath of Brexit and produced a new report with the aim of shaping a bright future for the industry.

Recommendations in each of five key areas identified by Confor form the basis of a new report called *A thriving forestry and timber sector in a post-Brexit world*.

“We looked at the big issues before the vote, what impact the decision to leave might have after the vote – and now we have consulted widely as we endeavour to shape the future our industry wants,” said Stuart Goodall.

“With the whole future of rural policy and funding up for discussion, there is a tremendous opportunity to integrate forestry and timber production as a major driver of rural development.”

“What we have tried to do with this latest report is to examine what the sector wants to happen in order to create the best conditions for it to thrive. But at the same time, we understand that we also need to work with other rural interests to shape a bright future for the rural economy as a whole.”

Following initial consultation, five work-streams were identified by Mr Goodall and Confor’s technical director Andrew Heald, and Confor members were invited to come up with recommendations for change in each area.

THE FIVE WORK-STREAMS

- **How do we deliver the new planting and restocking of the productive forests that drives the UK timber industry?**
- **How do we develop a truly integrated rural policy and support framework?**
- **EU environmental legislation: should it all be retained unchanged?**
- **Timber Standards, trade regulations and migrant labour: How do we retain access to markets and labour?**
- **How can we strengthen plant health and protection without restricting domestic trade?**

The above recommendations have been included in Confor’s report which will be shared and discussed with politicians at the Conservative Party conference, SNP conference and the

October meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Forestry.

“It is very important that we get across to politicians the key priorities of the sector,” said Mr Heald. “We do not want to become consumed by the technicalities of Brexit – we recognise change is coming and we want to shape the future in a positive way. It is really vital, for example, that we put forward positive recommendations to encourage more tree planting, especially in England.

“The latest statistics confirm our fears that planting in England is pitifully low and we really need to look to a future where we create a policy and business framework which allows more planting to take place.”

Joining efforts for a strong post-Brexit future

Mr Heald praised the Confor members who have provided input into the work-streams – Crispin Golding, Graham Taylor, John Gallagher Oliver Combe and Jim Pratt.

“They have come up with some great recommendations in a short space of time and given us a strong base on which to build that thriving future we all want,” he said.

Stuart Goodall stressed that Confor had consulted widely on the recommendations – and would continue to do so.

“We got both verbal and written feedback at the APF exhibition as well as constantly discussing the issue with the profession at all levels and encouraging the work-stream leaders to do the same,” he said.

“Confor also recognises the need for collaboration across the rural sector to shape a positive post-Brexit future. While all rural interests will make a strong case for their specific sector, constant jostling for position will not deliver a thriving future for our rural economy. We need to work together on some basic principles in the interests of our rural communities; that’s why we organised an APF event with the Forestry Commission, CLA and NFU (see report on p12) and a fringe event at the Conservative Party conference involving The Woodland Trust and CLA.”

Mr Goodall added: “The debate about Brexit will continue; this is far from the final word. Confor’s position will continue to evolve, based on the priorities of its members and the interests of the wider sector. However, this report gives us a very strong base on which to build the thriving future we all want for the sector.”



SHAPING THE FUTURE

For a hard copy of *A thriving forestry and timber sector in a post-Brexit world*, call the Confor office on 0131 240 1410.

- Next steps for Confor are to discuss the report with politicians through October at the Conservative and SNP conferences and at the APPGF at Westminster.

Confor will also continue to meet with other interest groups to find areas of common ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

New planting and restocking

- Simplify the application process, and drastically reduce lead-in times by reducing administration. The current application process needs to be streamlined and made much more systematic. There must be clarity and transparency in the consultation process
- Presumption in favour of new planting. New schemes, which are UKFS-compliant and located in 'favoured' areas should be fast-tracked. The focus of public consultation should be based on information-gathering. The role of Forestry Commission should be as a facilitator to move schemes forward.
- Link woodland creation to house building or other development permissions. Explore the potential to connect new developments with woodland creation, particularly in urban and suburban areas. Any loss of woodland (of all types) must be fully compensated by new woodland planting.

Rural policy and funding

- Develop an Integrated Rural Land Management policy. There is an urgent need for fully integrated land use policies, and to move away from silo thinking by separate forestry, environmental and farming interests. Land use policies must interconnect with local development and planning policies.
 - Simplify rural support mechanisms to focus on outcomes of land management. The focus of public funding for land management must be the delivery of public good and clearly targeted at achieving agreed outcomes. Support mechanisms must be robust and transparent, to drive confidence in long term business planning.
- Use Natural Capital Valuation techniques to support transparent decision-making. There are opportunities to use Natural Capital and other ecosystem service valuation techniques to assist in land use planning and decision-making, particularly in understanding and comparing 'trade-offs'. Techniques must focus on whole life cycles and include costing of any subsequent off-setting and off-shoring.

Environmental legislation

- Carry out a risk-based revision of Environmental Impact Assessment thresholds. Large planting schemes in areas of relatively low risk should not require EIAs. Where practicable, there should be a move from EIAs towards a wider assessment of benefits from new planting schemes, such as carbon storage, flood mitigation and economics.

- Interpretation and implementation of regulations must be consistent across all rural industries. Regulatory agencies must work with all land managers fairly, to ensure good practice and minimise negative impact.

- Review EU Environmental Directives and their impact on sawmills and processors to ensure they are delivering the desired outcomes and not unfairly penalising UK sawmills

Timber standards, trade regulations and migrant labour

- Revise the Construction Products Regulation (305/2011/EU). As an EU regulation this applies across the whole EU and sets out "mandated characteristics" for certain construction products and is aimed at breaking down technical barriers to trade. Revising this regulation could lower the barrier for UK forest products to be used more widely in construction.
- Ensure continued free movement of labour, or at least a seasonal rural worker scheme. The free movement of labour is essential across many parts of the forestry and timber sector, from nurseries, to planting squads to our sawmills and timber processors.
- Adopt a timber-first policy in procurement contracts, with a preference for domestic production. There is increasing interest in using more timber in construction, from Glue-lam and CLT replacing steel beams, to greater use of timber frame in off-site construction. Valuing the embedded carbon in forest products could drive forward its use.

Plant health

- Phytosanitary certificates should be required for all imported material. Better regulation of all plant material would limit the chance of new exotic pests and disease entering the UK; this regulation must also cover horticultural products as well as forestry.
- The importation of 'firewood' should be restricted? Restricting the importation of all firewood would severely reduce the risk of pest and disease entering the UK and increase demand for low grade fuel wood from the UK's under managed woods.
- Achieve consistent levels of new planting to enable nurseries to meet demand with domestic production. Short-term and inconsistent grant schemes leads to yo-yoing in planting, this means Long term stable and consistent support for new woodland creation would enable tree nurseries to better plan production, this in turn would mean less reliance on imported plants so reducing disease risk.

For report and all on Brexit visit

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