

Pressure mounts to reverse ‘disastrous’ planting record

WORK BY CONFOR IS STARTING TO MAKE AN IMPACT - BUT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE, ESPECIALLY ACROSS ENGLAND AND WALES

Even though 2016 was a post-CAP revision year when planting traditionally falls away it was still a disappointing one, made worse by disastrous figures for England and Wales. In a new modern-day low, England planted just 700 hectares with softwoods posted missing as usual.

This abject failure brought condemnation from Confor and others through the mainstream media and questions in Westminster, leading to a debate and inquiry secured by MPs working with Confor. Under pressure, forestry Minister Dr Thérèse Coffey has stated that it is still possible to achieve the Government's target of 11m trees during the lifetime of the 2015-2020 Parliament.

Giving evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee's forestry inquiry in January, Dr Coffey said: "I'm confident we will be planting more trees and comfortably hit the target we set ourselves by the end of this parliament."

Many in the profession question whether there is enough time to turn things around by 2020, but there are positive signs following the introduction of the Woodland Creation Planning Grant and the £19.2million Woodland Carbon Fund - both following lobbying by Confor.

Dr Coffey said she hoped these initiatives would bring forward more large planting proposals, and specifically mentioned Doddington North Moor in Northumberland, where a proposal is moving forward to plant 600,000 trees in the largest productive planting scheme in England in 20 years.

The Minister also told the inquiry: "We have seen a drop since we moved to the new Countryside Stewardship scheme, introduced last year - but in the second round of applications, we have seen an increase."

She said IT problems at the Rural Payments Agency were being addressed: "In terms of processing grants, I expect to see a step change by the end of this quarter." Dealing with the bureaucracy around environmental regulations would take long-

er, she admitted, while stressing that progress was being made.

In Scotland, planting looks set to hit a recent high of around 9000ha in 2017 - a figure given by Head of Forestry Commission Scotland Jo O'Hara in evidence to a Scottish Parliament committee in late 2016. The same committee is examining the need for more funding for tree planting, which has already been increased from £36m to £40m in the recent Scottish Government budget following evidence given by Confor.

Much of the increase in planting applications and, in particular the higher percentage of softwood planting coming forward, can be traced back to work by Confor to improve the operation of the grant scheme, including tackling inappropriate opposition to schemes from third parties and unbalanced incentives. There is still work to do to meet (and exceed) the 10,000ha a year target, and to secure planting of all types across all of Scotland, but the situation has been transformed from before.

Cabinet support

Confor hopes to be aided in this by the appointment of Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity Fergus Ewing who has put forestry at the heart of his policy programme. Following a suggestion by Confor, he commissioned a report by former Chief Planner Jim Mackinnon, which makes practical recommendations to streamline the application process, including: giving local Forestry Commission offices more responsibility to approve lower value applications; earlier engagement between tree-planting businesses and communities; and a dedicated national Forestry Commission Scotland team to

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THE SOFTWOOD DILEMMA:

RESTOCKING AND NEW PLANTING OF CONIFERS IN THE UK

A close look at the figures in the FC Canopy Cover Report raise serious concerns about the sustainability of UK planting: productive conifer forests are harvested to supply markets with valuable softwood, which is the bread and butter of the UK forestry and timber sector. However, felled areas are reallocated to different land uses or forestry types and are not fully restocked with productive softwood. New planting of conifers is far from sustainable levels and cannot

make up for the loss in restocking. This is a serious threat for future supply of timber in the UK and depresses the sector's enthusiasm for investment.

In this infographic, we use a hypothetical 100 ha forest lot to show worrying trends that become evident from planting figures.

RESTOCKING

On average across the UK 100 hectares of productive conifers would be made up of approximately 81% Sitka spruce and 19% other conifers. Some of that forest might be planted on deep peat, and some of it might be PAWS. After harvesting, the 100 hectares are not replanted with the same proportion of productive conifers. This happens for a number of reasons, such as environmental or landscape considerations or grant priorities. 10 years after felling, only 51 out of 100 ha have been replanted with equivalent productive conifers. The productive area for softwood has effectively been halved.



100
HECTARES

51
HECTARES

23
HECTARES
WOODLAND IN
TRANSITION

18
HECTARES

8 HECTARES
OPEN
GROUND

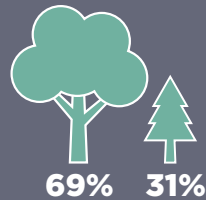
NEW PLANTING

However, future supply of softwoods needs to be guaranteed. To what extent is new planting making up for the loss of restocking?



Over the last five years, 52,200ha of NEW forest have been planted, only 12,100 of which are conifers.

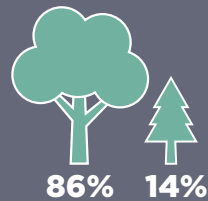
SCOTLAND



ENGLAND



WALES



N. IRELAND



SOFTWOOD IS THE TIMBER INDUSTRIES' BREAD AND BUTTER.

All data sourced from canopy cover report and cover the period 2011-2016.

Exact New Planting data are as follows: UK: 52,200 ha (of which 11,100 conifers); England: 11,600 ha (of which 11,500 conifers); Scotland: 36,500 ha (of which 25,100 conifers); Wales: 2,800 ha (of which 2,400 conifers); Northern Ireland: 1,200 ha (of which no conifers)

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deal with complex proposals including all projects where Environmental Impact Assessments are required.

Mr Ewing has accepted all the proposals and called for an update in the spring - and the practical recommendations should start to have a real impact in late 2017 and especially the planting season of early 2018.

Ian Gambles, Head of Forestry Commission England, told the EFRA inquiry in late 2016 that he was following developments in Scotland with interest - an approach encouraged by Confor as only around 1.3 million trees have been planted in the last 18 months in England, the same number as were planted at the Jerah site in central Scotland in five months.

Chris Davies MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Forestry, has highlighted the danger of a timber gap from the 2030s, where the drop-off in softwood planting sees supply fall short of demand.

In Wales, the new grant scheme has restarted planting and it is attractive to both softwood and hardwood planting. However, the attitude of agencies and stakeholders is still largely negative to planting, especially of softwoods, and as well as securing political support Confor is seeking to build partnerships with other stakeholders to secure a significant increase in planting levels.

In Northern Ireland, there is also a favourable new scheme and an interest in planting productive forests, but making the process attractive to applicants and securing interest from the farming community is a continuing challenge.

At the start of 2017, there is real hope of a stronger future - especially with the whole forestry sector pulling in the same direction. Beccy Speight, Chief Executive of the Woodland Trust, told the EFRA inquiry that there needed to be more woodland of all types, while Rebecca Pow MP, co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ancient Woodland & Veteran Trees, said there was much greater potential to grow the timber industry and expressed concern about future supply.

2030s

**DEMAND FOR
SOFTWOOD IS
FORECAST TO
EXCEED
UK SUPPLY**



A bright future for forestry after Brexit

Confor has started work to develop a detailed position on Brexit, with the aim of pursuing an integrated land use policy and funding framework for the UK with forestry at its heart.

In 2016, Confor produced discussion papers before and after the UK vote to leave the European Union, following up with broad recommendations for the future in *A Thriving Forestry and Timber Sector in a post-Brexit World*.

Eleanor Harris has been brought on board to work with the Confor team to develop its vision of “a truly integrated rural policy and funding framework”, which was at the heart of the Thriving Future document.

Stuart Goodall, Confor’s Chief Executive, said: “Throughout this debate, Confor has always tried to look ahead at the emerging policy debate for rural areas. We have a vision for forestry, and we want to present that vision in a broader picture of future integrated land use.”



Woodland Carbon Fund

www.forestry.gov.uk/england-wcf

Woodland Creation Planning Grant

(part of Forestry Innovation Fund)
www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/bee-h-a4lgde

MacKinnon report can be viewed or downloaded from the Confor website

www.confor.org.uk/resources/publications/reference-publications/