

Joint statement from The Woodland Trust, CLA and Confor on forests and woodland policy after Brexit

As the UK prepares to leave the European Union in March 2019, we see a real opportunity to make positive changes to the future of support for farming and the countryside.

We are encouraged by the views of Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove MP, in his speech on delivering a “Green Brexit” in July. In particular we agree with him that ‘trees are not only a source of beauty and wonder, living evidence of our investment for future generations, they are also a carbon sink, a way to manage flood risk and a habitat for precious species.’¹

There is an ongoing debate about what measures the Government will put in place to support the UK countryside, replacing the current system of rural grants and payments shaped by the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

As individual organisations we are making our own contributions to different areas of this debate. However, we share a common approach to some fundamental principles regarding the development of forestry and woodlands policy after Brexit.

We agree that the following approaches should be taken forward through the forthcoming 25 Year Plan for the Environment and through future legislation and support mechanisms:

- **The UK would benefit from more forests and woods.** Ambitious annual tree planting targets (in hectares) should be introduced with clear goals for forest cover that reflect the many benefits they can deliver and that address our present unacceptably low level of woodland cover. These targets should be clearly linked to the needs of the UK economy, helping to tackle climate change, enhancing biodiversity and providing places for recreation.
- **Support for woodland creation and tree planting should be improved after Brexit.** A new countryside policy and contract between farmers, landowners and society should include well designed measures to achieve an ambitious uplift in the area of woodland cover in the UK, and see more woodland managed sustainably.
- **Tree planting needs to be environmentally and economically sustainable.** Tree planting schemes under new arrangements should take into account future needs of rural business, local people and wildlife, including the need to mitigate or reduce flood risk and to protect and enhance existing habitats.
- **Owners of existing woodland should be rewarded for the public benefits it delivers.** Existing woodland already delivers significant public benefits in terms of carbon sequestration, water management, soil protection and wildlife habitat but these benefits are completely unrewarded. In any future policy, owners who manage their woodland to the UK Forestry Standard should be rewarded for the public benefits their woodland delivers.
- **Forestry in the UK needs to be more visible, better understood and encouraged.** Forestry is a £2 billion business in the UK supporting 80,000 jobs. With huge potential for growth, it can provide more jobs, more forest products, and increased environmental benefits and economic opportunities for all in the UK.
- **Britain needs to use more timber in construction.** More home-grown timber in domestic construction will enable the UK to build desperately needed better quality homes faster and with a lower carbon footprint.

Signed:

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The Woodland Trust has over 500,000 members and supporters and manages more than 1,000 woodland sites, covering over 26,000 hectares, all over the UK. Our vision is for a UK rich in native woods and trees, for people and wildlife.



The CLA is the membership organisation for owners of land, property and businesses in rural England and Wales. CLA members own or manage more than 10 million acres of rural land and just over one third are actively involved in forestry and woodland management.



Confor is the UK’s leading membership organisation for sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses. Representing over 1600 businesses, Confor provides a single, powerful voice to ensure our industry thrives long into the future.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-unfrozen-moment-delivering-a-green-brexit>