

Conference heralds golden era for forestry



David Lee reports from the Confor Superwood conference

Confor is determined to build on a very positive day of discussions at its Superwood conference last December, where a room packed with a wide variety of delegates heard that the “stars are aligned” for the forestry and wood-using industry. However, the event at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon Tyne was told that there was no time to spare - the sector must take advantage of an increasingly favourable climate towards tree planting and timber construction right now.

Delegates from the entire forestry and wood supply chain - plus politicians, environmental NGOs, academics, students, timber construction experts and more - discussed how forestry and wood could drive a low-carbon economy and make a significant impact on climate change targets.

Paul Brannen, MEP for North East England, said:

“The sector has never been in a better place and must not miss the opportunity. The stars are aligned and we need to make it happen - but in terms of climate change, time is running out. We need to plant more trees now.”

Confor is putting climate change at the heart of its activity in 2019, while Friends of the Earth (FoE) is also placing a major emphasis on the issue. Its Head of Science, Policy and Research Mike Childs said his organisation wanted to double tree cover and Confor is discussing how it can work with FoE to deliver a step change in productive planting.

Stuart Goodall, Chief Executive of Confor, welcomed Mr Childs’ positive comments and the growing recognition that forestry and wood are crucial to meeting climate change objectives. “We have made good progress, but need to develop more partnerships to deliver more tree planting, build more with wood and have a real impact on climate change,” he said.

Adam James came all the way from Canada to describe the wood-first construction policy in British Columbia. Mr James, who worked on the project to create the tallest wooden building in the world (an

We are all part of the Superwood campaign. It’s a campaign to plant more trees, do more with timber and create jobs and the greener economy we want to see.

Paul Brannen, MEP (Labour), North East England

18-storey student accommodation block in Vancouver, built in just nine weeks), said: “If you don’t build with wood, you have to explain why. We have public policy in favour of building with wood and an education and skills system aligned with that. When you have that, projects happen in the middle.”

Neil Sutherland of MAKAR, based in the Scottish Highlands, reminded delegates that 80 per cent of homes in Scotland were made using timber frames, but only around 15 per cent in England. There was a real challenge in breaking through in terms of using much more timber because high-volume house-builders were not bought into the timber agenda, he added.

Rob Allen, of Citu, outlined his company’s vision of using timber to unlock the carbon-negative home. He said continuing to build traditional masonry houses was totally unsustainable in terms of tackling climate change - as a typical house ‘costs’ 65 tonnes of carbon dioxide, while Citu had calculated that one of its homes could actually ‘save’ 23 tonnes of carbon when all factors were taken into account.

Backing investment

Peter Jackson - leader of Northumberland County Council - backed moves for a Forestry Investment Zone (FIZ) in the county to drive more productive tree planting in the North East. Councillor Jackson said he wanted to make Northumberland “the forestry friendly county” and pledged to work with the industry to make it happen.

Beccy Speight, CEO of the Woodland Trust, said there was a definite place for commercial forestry in delivering the Northern Forest project, which aims to plant 50 million trees across the North of Eng-

land. She said it was important to build on positive collaboration with Confor to make this happen and urged the industry to come up with projects to plant at scale - and to identify a site for a FIZ in the Northern Forest area.

A central theme of the event was the rapidly increasing demand for wood. Simon Hart of EGGER said a strong, long-term wood supply was crucial to businesses like EGGER - which employs almost 650 people at its chipboard factory at Hexham in Northumberland - and more sites must be found to ensure this happened.

Mr Hart said that we had to look very carefully at the wide range of designations [in areas like Northumberland] which made it difficult to plant trees - and ensure these designations were fully justified, and balanced against the multiple benefits delivered by forestry.

Dr Dan Ridley-Ellis, of Edinburgh Napier University, said there was a strong push for wood use in the growing bio-economy. While there were huge opportunities, he stressed that we had to be realistic: “Wood is abundant - but abundant does not mean limitless.”

FTN EVENT RESOURCES



- Presentations from the conference
- Photo gallery by Andrew O’Brien
- Delegate feedback
- Social media highlights and relevant links
- www.confor.org.uk/news/latest-news/stars-aligned-for-forestry-and-wood

SPEAKING OUT FOR FORESTRY



Global demand for timber is rising dramatically, everybody thinks planting trees is a good idea ... so everything must be rosy? No - we are only planting 1000 to 2000ha in England each year. It is very difficult to get approval.
Simon Hart, EGGER Forestry



As you build more with timber, it becomes part of the culture and as that grows, it becomes commonplace.
Adam James, Ryder Architecture, talking about British Columbia



We want the presumption shifted towards, not away from, forestry.
Beccy Speight, CEO, Woodland Trust



Wood is abundant - but abundant does not mean limitless.
Dan Ridley-Ellis, Edinburgh Napier University



The Government is starting to recognise it has to help by addressing some of the barriers that are currently putting a brake on productive woodland creation in England.
Peter Jackson, Leader, Northumberland County Council