FORESTRY & TIMBER NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Encouraging support on a world stage

STUART GOODALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CONFOR

In the first week of COP28 in Dubai, media attention fell on Rishi Sunak's private jet and King Charles making the keynote speech while wearing a tie featuring tiny Greek flags, clearly in reference to Rishi's recent spat with the Greek PM.

Thankfully the week ended with the significant announcement by 17 countries, including the UK, that they were committed to "advancing policies and approaches that support low carbon construction and increase the use of wood from sustainably managed forests in the built environment" by 2030.

This announcement came on the eve of Confor's London policy conference, which saw the launch of the National Wood Strategy for England. The Strategy is a blueprint for "planting, growing, harvesting and processing conifer and broadleaf trees in England" and aims to put timber production at the heart of policymaking. This is vital if we are to achieve net zero by 2050 in the UK.

As we know, the net zero target is not about avoiding the damaging impacts of climate change, it's an attempt to avoid its worst effects. The global aim is to limit warming "to well below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels".

If we fail to limit global warming by mid-century, then various scientific studies have identified 'tipping points' which could be crossed that would lead to accelerated climate change. In the final episode of *Planet Earth III*, David Attenborough spoke about the death of coral reefs as one tipping point, as is the shutting down of the Gulf Stream.

With this clearly in mind, the sector needs to achieve its planting targets and strengthen the connection between forestry policy and carbon reduction in all its forms – planting, management of existing woodland and greater use of domestic wood.

The new UK Forestry Minister Rebecca Pow MP echoed this in her presentation to the conference: "The timber industry is critically important and something we need to give more focus to. We need woodland creation of all types, delivering for the economy, nature and the environment... including productive mostly conifer woodlands which absorb carbon faster and contribute to the green economy through timber. This is why we will continue to support the planting of well-designed, mixed and conifer-dominated woodlands".

In 2024, we need to get back on track and deliver.

"THE SECTOR NEEDS TO ACHIEVE ITS PLANTING TARGETS AND STRENGTHEN THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FORESTRY POLICY AND CARBON REDUCTION IN ALL ITS FORMS"

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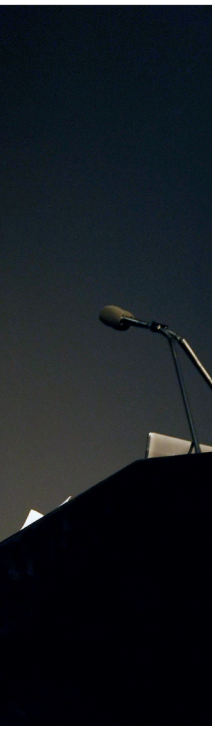
L-R: Andy Leitch, Stuart Goodall, Trudy Harrison MP, Tom Barnes

L-R: Richard Hunter, Laura Henderson, Emma Kerr, Harry Stevens, Olly Hughes

Tom Barnes



Wood is the missing link for **green growth**

The National Wood Strategy for England was launched at Confor's policy conference in London – and its lead author hopes it will become redundant within a year. Reporting by **David Lee** and **Eleanor O'Neill**.

Confor Members and guests gathered in London for our 2023 UK policy conference on 7 December. Speakers and panellists from across the industry, public sector and academia addressed some of the key issues facing the forestry and wood-using sectors in a day of thought-provoking discussion.

The highlight of Green Growth: Why Wood is the Missing Low-Carbon Link was the launch of a National Wood Strategy for England, co-authored by Confor Deputy Chief Executive Andy Leitch and Tom Barnes, Managing Director of Vastern Timber.

Plans to prepare the Strategy began at the 2022 conference, where Tom promised: "This Strategy will be practical, short, clearly written and action oriented. It has a single focus - on planting, growing, investing in, and processing conifer and broadleaf trees in England - to produce wood and wood products."

Speaking at this year's event, he said that the real measure of success of the Strategy would be the delivery of its aims through collaboration between industry, UK Government, forestry agencies, investors and environmental organisations.

The Strategy is a blueprint for "planting, growing, harvesting and processing conifer and broadleaf trees in England" and aims to put timber production at the heart of policymaking.

The stand-out message is 'clarity' on why we want to plant trees. This includes honesty about the fact that, if the UK wants to grow more of its own timber, it must grow more softwood - and therefore plant far more fast-growing conifer trees.

Tom praised the "considerable input" of the Forestry Commission, and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), saying: "The previous Minister [Trudy Harrison MP] and the Forestry Commission have been consistently and openly supportive of productive forestry in the last year."

Trudy Harrison attended the event and was glad to receive her own copy of the Strategy from Tom himself.

Earlier, new Forestry Minister Rebecca Pow MP voiced her commitment to the industry, saying: "The timber industry is critically important and something we need to give more focus to. We need woodland creation of all types, delivering for the economy, nature and the environment... including productive mostly conifer woodlands which absorb carbon faster and contribute to the green economy through timber.

"This is why we will continue to support the planting of well-designed, mixed and conifer-dominated woodlands."

The Minister, who could unfortunately not attend in-person, provided a video message welcoming the publication of the Strategy, the challenge from industry in it, and the opportunities for collaboration.

Tom further explained that the Strategy should be seen in the context of rising global demand for wood (and future wood shortages) and the statutory target of increasing UK woodland cover to 16.5% by 2050. He stressed that the status quo simply wasn't enough and highlighted 'Five Cs': Clarity, Consistency, Capital, Communication, and Collaboration.

He said collaboration was at the very heart of the Strategy succeeding and emphasised it is crucial to continue the positive partnership working that created >>

David Lee

Student Delegates

Andy Leitch

the Strategy through into delivering it. "It is how we create a strategic wood reserve for the future," he said. "I applaud those who put their heads above the parapet and went beyond silo thinking."

"Forestry has momentum. Let's replace doom and gloom with positive news... What part will you play to deliver the planting target by 2050?"

(More on the National Wood Strategy for England can be found on p11.)

Response to the National Wood Strategy

Naomi Matthiessen, Trees Co-Lead at Defra, was pleased the positivity of the 2022 conference had been carried through to 2023.

In response to requests from the industry, she argued that much had been achieved in the past year, including enshrining the 2050 woodland cover target in law, and committing to increasing the conifer component of planting from the current under 10% to 30%. She also highlighted "reducing the burden of consultation and streamlining the approval process" - specifically the extension of the planting window from 2 to 3 years and the maintenance grant from 10 to 15 years.

There has also been a near £5 million investment in future industry skills, she added, while strategies on deer management and squirrel control - and the Timber in Construction roadmap - were imminent (see p16). "Great progress has been made," she said. "It takes time to collaborate, and a huge amount of effort has gone into collaboration with the National Wood Strategy, and I think it is richer as a result.

"We are enthusiastic supporters of its ambitious strategic goals. We do not agree with every single thing in it but acknowledge the challenge it sets the government and its commitment to collaboration and partnership."

Richard Stanford, Chief Executive of Forestry Commission, said the Strategy needed to be accompanied by a strong focus on timber security, at a time when countries exporting wood to the UK were losing their own timber resource through pests and diseases [Germany] and wildfires [Canada].

"We have been incentivising slow-growing broadleaves over fast-growing conifers... and need to look at the evidence [that fast-growing conifers are needed for timber security]," he said. "Let's make evidence-based decisions and let's do it at pace."

He said the forestry sector had to "stop asking for permission and deliver solutions", adding: "It's about behavioural change; we need to stop talking to ourselves."

Stuart Goodall, CEO of Confor, agreed with this sentiment and reflected on what he hopes will be seen in future as a landmark event: "A year ago the then forestry minister Trudy Harrison gave us hope that productive forestry and home-grown wood would be brought 'in from the cold' and be recognised as an important part of England's forestry policy and ambitions to tackle climate change and support a strong, green rural economy.

"A year on, and we can see how that political leadership has created a new sense of optimism. The Wood Strategy and the actions taken by Defra and Forestry Commission to improve the tree planting process and make it inclusive are strongly welcomed. We now have recognition that there is a timber security challenge for the UK that is real and important."

The Net Zero Issue

Dr Niki Rust, Head of Land, Agriculture and Nature at the Climate Change Committee (CCC), independent adviser on strategies to support the climate change ambitions of the UK Government and devolved administrations, told the conference that tree planting is "way off track".

"To reach net zero by 2050, we advised [the UK Government] the target of planting 30,000 hectares of trees per year by 2025, increasing to 50,000 hectares by 2035," she explained. "We advised that tree cover, both conifer and broadleaf, [should] increase from 13% to 18% across the whole of the UK by 2050."

Currently, she said, the UK Government's efforts to reach the target were "way off track due to our inability to plant". The destruction wrought by Storm Arwen and diseases meant that the UK reached a point where the net amount of trees planted in 2021 was approaching zero.

She added: "We have become rubbish at planting trees over time. We can do it and have done in the past and that gives me hope."

Niki urged future tree planting policies to recognise that the extremes of climate change were likely to increase, saying: "We need to consider the permanence of carbon credits, planting more diverse and resilient tree stock and better-designed woodlands. Forests resilient to climate change help protect nature. Nature is important in helping us get to net zero, it underpins everything."

Stuart Goodall also addressed the net zero issue, expressing frustration that wood wasn't more prominent in the conversation.

"Homegrown wood has a valuable role beyond net zero [but] support in public policy has been patchy," he said. "Current strategies and standards say almost nothing about it.

"Standing on a global stage saying you will lead from the front, you then have to deliver on your statements, not only achieving at home, but with our global contribution to net zero, because future imports are not going to be available.

"I want to establish why wood production is good, who needs to know, and make sure those audiences understand increased wood production, for timber security and to secure that future supply, to ensure public policy changes do not inadvertently undermine that."

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L-R: Richard Stanford, Naomi Matthiessen, Gail Merriman, Tom Barnes

Andy Leitch said it was no surprise the UK was importing so much wood when it only had forest cover of 13% against a European average of 46%.

The future timber 'supply squeeze' meant a challenging balancing act between supply and demand of wood in the UK, he warned. This will involve more recycling of wood and growing the 'value chain', so timber is used to create higher-value products whenever possible.

"There is a massive opportunity to increase the amount of timber used in construction," he added, pointing to the potential to reduce softwood imports by planting more Sitka and Norway spruce.

Dan Ridley-Ellis, Head of Wood Science and Technology at Edinburgh Napier University, highlighted the global pressure on wood supply: "As the world becomes more affluent, we will need more wood."

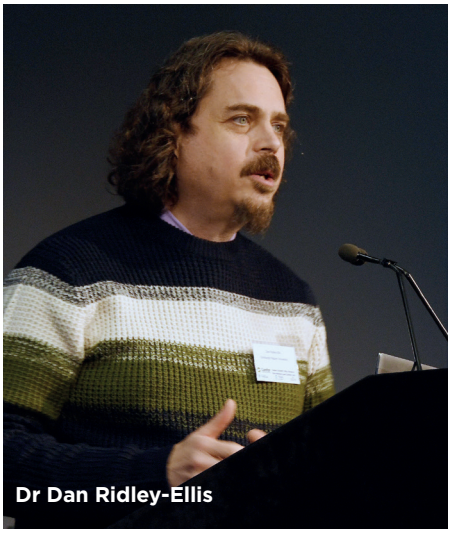
He urged delegates to build enthusiasm about forestry and wood by "planting seeds in forests and in people's minds".

His current research involves identifying new hardwood species with potential to use in construction. This required repeated testing and large volumes of data. Dan stressed that hardwoods will only ever be a small part of construction: "Softwoods are vital, hardwoods are the icing on the cake, and we need everything."

He urged planting with purpose: "A forest planted for nature needs to wash its face by producing timber and providing money for management."

Dr Eilidh Forster of Bangor University said wood had to be used "incredibly efficiently" and that ambitious planting targets had to have "duration" and not just be short-termist. "Getting more trees into the ground is complicated and time-consuming," she said.

"Any climate change strategy must be supported with planting scenarios that have duration, under which we moderate the way we use wood, not just using more but by doing more with the wood we already use.



Dr Dan Ridley-Ellis

"At its heart must be a vision that everyone can buy into, including [agreement] on the role of forestry in a circular bioeconomy."

In a session where industry experts suggested policy changes for a future UK Government, Emma Kerr, Head of Carbon at Scottish Woodlands Ltd, cautioned that the Woodland Carbon Code could have damaging consequences for future UK timber supply.

She described possible impacts of 2022 changes to the Code using a case study of a planting scheme (Tillyrie in Perthshire), managed by Scottish Woodlands for James Jones & Sons Ltd. The research examined how the 86.96-hectare project, planted before the 2022 changes took effect, would have been affected by the updated rules if planted today.

The plan was UK Forestry Standard compliant but, under the new rules, the net productive conifer area would have been reduced by almost 50% to qualify for support under the Code's new 'additionality' rules.

James Jones & Sons calculated the current scheme could yield 37,732 tonnes of productive timber. The reduced conifer scenario under the new rules would yield 19,809 tonnes - a significant loss. In turn, this would reduce the yield of 4,500 cubic metres of carcassing material to 2,262 cubic metres, and the number of new homes which could potentially be built from Tillyrie timber from 900 to 472.

"If you extrapolate our findings to all UK schemes where landowners are seeking carbon credits, the reduction of new productive conifer area, and timber for construction would be very significant," Emma warned. "These are potentially very serious consequences when the UK wants to produce more home-grown wood and build more sustainable homes to reach net zero by 2050."

Easy to miss opportunities

Olly Hughes, Managing Director of Gresham House, warned investment could seep away from the UK without more clarity on what tree planting was seeking to achieve.

He said investors had a wide range of environmental, social, and financial reasons for supporting planting, but added: "One commonality across all tree planting at scale in the UK is that you never end up with the original planting scheme proposed. This doesn't work for anyone. If you start with one thing and end up with something else, you will only do it once."

Olly said private capital looking for a home in forestry could be deployed very effectively when there was intense pressure on public finances. Yet, he argued, the current system forced planting schemes of all types to "contort" to fit existing rules.

"We must accept one size does not fit all," he said, arguing that a range of standards based on clear, long-term objectives for carbon, nature and timber production were needed for planting schemes. "We need forests designed for specific purposes in defined areas with set returns that can

be relied upon. Private capital has a way of working out how to solve problems if clear rules are set and stuck to. If the rules keep changing, it stops.

"Every time rules or policies change, and every time subjectivity comes in, investors will lose confidence - and [find] other places to invest."

Harry Stevens, Managing Director of Tilhill, said the challenge of reducing UK timber imports from 80%+ was challenging because markets and infrastructure had grown up around timber imports, creating vested interests.

The UK has also created a challenge for itself by growing timber at a grade which was good enough for the vast majority of construction uses, but sometimes rejected because architects and specifiers request a higher grade and choose imported material instead.

Harry identified "enormous potential" for home-grown timber in England where just 9% of new housing starts use timber frames, compared to 92% in Scotland. Increasing the number of new housing starts using timber, and specifying the use of home-grown timber wherever possible, are crucial factors in future change, he said.

Laura Henderson, Director of English Woodlands Forestry, said the "distracting irrelevance" of conifer vs broadleaf planting must be replaced with site-specific approach based on clarity of what a planting scheme was designed to achieve in terms of timber production, biodiversity or other objectives.

She described the specific challenges faced in southern England, including access to sites to fell timber, economies of scale and the huge difficulties of managing the threats from deer and squirrels.

"If 85% of broadleaf planting is going to woodfuel, we are failing to maximise the benefits," she stated, concluding by saying that incentives need to be directed at planting which address the challenges of the day.

Richard Hunter, Technical & Industry Support Manager of Confor, talked about the additional challenge of recruiting 2,000 more people into forestry in England by 2025. One issue was tackling outdated perceptions that "cutting down trees is bad" which he heard from his own primary school age daughter.

Taking the message into schools – for example by becoming a STEM ambassador – is vital, he insisted.

Alongside raising awareness, access to forestry courses was a problem with just a handful of the UK's 225 colleges offering a forestry option. "Vast chunks of people can't access forestry courses because the nearest college is so far away and it is cost-prohibitive," Richard explained. "The UK Government needs to fund courses better; the private sector can provide equipment and sites, but cash resources are needed to make it happen."

He said the industry also had to be better at offering alternatives. There were 900 applications for 15 Woodland Officer posts with the Forestry Commission, but the pathways weren't there to ensure a proportion of the 885 people who weren't selected could find different jobs or courses in forestry.

Reflecting on the challenges issued and hopes raised by the day, Stuart Goodall concluded: "At the conference I set the scene for the day by expressing the passion that I have, and which is shared across the industry, for productive forestry and home-grown wood products to make a bigger contribution to tackling climate change, something that has been recognised as important by 17 countries, including the UK, at COP28 in Dubai.

"I think many people, me included, are seriously concerned that globally we will fail to hit our 2050 targets and future generations will suffer the consequences. Tree planting and greater wood use won't, in themselves, make the difference but they can make a significant contribution.

"As we go forward from this conference, the forestry and wood-using industry needs to communicate its positive story. Many people lack trust in businesses, and the legacy of tree planting in the 20th century is in the minds of some and is picked up by those concerned by changing landscapes now, so we have to redouble our efforts to set out the 'why' of productive tree planting and greater wood production. Confor is working on this and I look forward to sharing our ideas in 2024."

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SCOTTISH WOODLANDS

National Wood Strategy for England: Key points

The National Wood Strategy for England aims to describe how England's forest and wood-based industries – in collaboration with government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and professional membership organisations - can increase the growing, harvesting and production of timber in England.

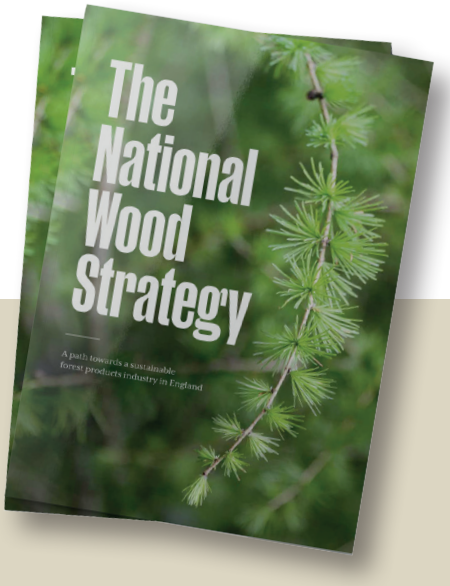
It sets out six strategic goals in order to achieve this:

1. Stabilise and then increase the timber resource in England.
2. Exceed the Government's statutory target for tree and woodland cover.
3. Increase the use and lifespan of English wood.
4. Create a predictable and consistent investment environment.
5. Present a consistent and positive message on productive woodlands.
6. Develop a skilled workforce.

The most urgent actions outlined for Government centre around more ambitious planting targets with specific goals for woodland types, transparency and ease in application processes, and more support for farmers in England looking to contribute to tree cover.

Industry is called upon to invest in new research and technology, to develop resilient woodlands, and to explore opportunities for improving resource efficiency.

Collaboration is the key theme of the document and next steps for the Strategy authors, contributors and for Confor include forming a cross-sector group to support delivery of the statutory planting target. Further, the England Forest and Wood-Based Industry Leadership Group (ILG) has been asked to assemble a representative board to monitor implementation of the Strategy's aims.



Successful negotiation of a 'Timber Sector Deal' continues to be a main priority for Confor, in addition to supporting the Forestry Skills Forum and other vital initiatives that will play a significant role in seeing these goals realised.

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NEW FACES FOR THE NEW YEAR

Confor's **Jon Garson** reviews the new appointments in Rishi Sunak's Cabinet and how the changes impact Confor's plans for 2024.

Though not a Friday, 13 November certainly proved unlucky for some as PM Rishi Sunak carried out the second cabinet reshuffle of his year-old tenure.

Headlines were dominated by the sacking of Suella Braverman and the return to Cabinet of former PM David Cameron, but the reshuffle also saw substantive change across government. In addition to the high-profile changes at the Home and Foreign offices, two other front benchers resigned from Cabinet and a significant number of junior Ministers and Parliamentary Under Secretaries either resigned or were dismissed.

While upsets occurred in most departments, few saw as much change as the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs with Cabinet Secretary Theresa Coffey and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Trudy Harrison both tendering their resignation.

While we look forward to developing close relationships with the new leadership team, it would be remiss of us not to recognise the progress made under Theresa Coffey and particularly Trudy Harrison. Trudy was a champion of the industry and under her leadership we made significant progress on a number of critical issues for the industry.

Given the level of change and the expectation that the country will face a general election in 2024, we now know the teams that will take the Conservatives and Labour into the general election. However, this level of change so close to an election presents challenges for our sector as we look to build on our recent progress and growing influence. While the new appointments will be briefed by their officials it is important that Confor engages as quickly as possible to ensure that industries voice is heard.

We have been in touch with the new Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Rebecca Pow and requested a meeting at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the momentum we have generated on issues such as a Timber in Construction roadmap and a potential Sector Deal for the industry, as well as the National Wood Strategy for England the Timber.

In addition to engagement at the elected official level, Confor continues to work to influence all parties as they develop their election manifestos. This is a significant challenge as the economy does not appear to be the central element of either of the two parties that will form government policy thinking.

As demonstrated by the Conservatives' five pledges and Labour's five missions, the coming election will place a heavy focus on social issues.

Confor has undertaken considerable efforts to increase our political engagement which has produced success in terms of increased visibility and understanding of the industry. We will continue these efforts at all levels to ensure that this increased level of understanding is translated into concrete actions to enhance and grow the industry across the country.

WINNERS AND LOSERS IN CABINET RESHUFFLE

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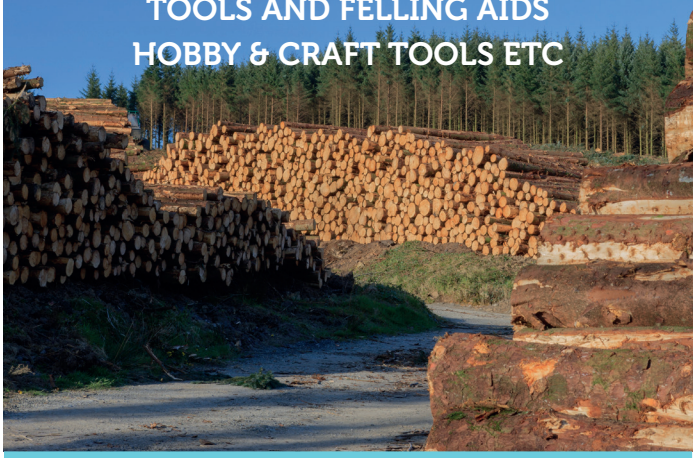

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CLEAR AGREEMENT ACROSS THE BOARD ON PLANTING FOR TIMBER SECURITY

November's meeting of the APPG on Forestry and Tree Planting saw industry, government and public sector officials all vying for home-grown timber to be a policy priority.

The latest meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Forestry and Tree Planting heard how the National Wood Strategy for England can deliver practical actions to put timber production at the heart of future forestry policy-making - and build on the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) report, which called for greater domestic timber production.

The Strategy, which was formally launched at Confor's policy conference on 7 December, calls for clarity on which trees we need to plant where to secure future timber supply, sequester more carbon and create more jobs, especially in rural areas.

Tom Barnes, co-author of the Strategy, said it flowed naturally from July's EAC report and Ben Lake MP, APPG Chair, will write to new Environment Secretary Steve Barclay MP, asking when the UK Government will respond to the EAC report, as its reply is two months' late.

Philip Dunne, EAC Chair, told the APPG meeting at Westminster why the inquiry that led to the report (Seeing The Wood for The Trees) was carried out: "We were concerned that the Government had made a number of commitments and pledges to increase tree planting which were not being met."

A major driver of the report was the need for more timber for construction in future and the need to grow more as global demand for wood soared [The World Bank estimates it could quadruple by 2050].

UK demand is also expected to rise, partly because of the Government's commitment to promote timber use in construction as part of its Net Zero Strategy. Yet the UK imported 81% of all its timber in 2021, and without urgent action its home-grown timber supply is set to fall even further behind demand.

Mr Dunne said predominantly broadleaf planting was not enough and suggested specific targets for additional planting of wood producing forests that are primarily softwood. Tom Barnes picked up on this later as he called for greater clarity and a higher profile for timber production.

"My job is to build on the EAC report and look at the actions and steps forward," he said. "The focus is on how we grow and use wood, which hasn't had a lot of attention in recent decades."

He said the context of the report was the UK's aim to have 16.5% of woodland cover by 2050 (Anna Brown of Forestry Commission later stressed the target was "at least 16.5%") and the increasing global shortage of wood fibre.

"GOING FORWARD, WE NEED POLICY TO BE MADE ON THE BASIS OF EVIDENCE AND NOT PERCEPTION OR PREJUDICE."

"Business as usual will not achieve the statutory [16.5%] UK target," Mr Barnes stressed.

He praised the collaborative effort put into the Strategy by industry, UK Government, public forestry bodies and environmental organisations, and said that all the positive input left him very hopeful about the Strategy - and opportunities for future collaboration.

"The Strategy isn't a 25-year wish list, it's what actions can we take now - while recognising that this is a long-term industry," Mr Barnes said.

He summarised the focus of the Strategy as "clarity" – on what we want to achieve by planting trees, and what actions are needed to take to achieve that.

"We need to acknowledge [as the EAC report says] that we need to produce more of our own timber. That means mainly softwoods, so that means planting more conifer trees. We then need to ask how many trees we need and help give clarity and consistency to investors to bring private money into forestry. We also need a clear vision from industry about how we can do better in terms of how we use the wood we produce."

Mr Barnes called for the phrase "the right tree in the right place" to be shelved. "It's a way of avoiding difficult conversations and the trade-offs we need to make," he said. "It's about which trees we plant in which places to achieve our outcomes in producing more home-grown timber."

continued on p16

continued from p15

Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall said the EAC report and the National Wood Strategy offered an opportunity to put timber production back into "inclusive policy making".

"We need to remember sustainability is about economic, social and environmental objectives, not just environmental ones," he said. "I've been involved in creating many strategies over the years and it's always the actions to help deliver jobs and rural growth that aren't taken forward."

He praised Trudy Harrison MP, who left her role as Forestry Minister in the reshuffle last month, for recognising the importance of wood production in delivering long-term rural growth and jobs – as well as delivering net zero objectives.

"Going forward, we need policy to be made on the basis of evidence and not perception or prejudice," Mr Goodall said.

Anna Brown, Director of Forest Services at the Forestry Commission, said: "We need timber security, and we cannot carry on importing what we are currently importing." She said she wasn't necessarily opposed to putting a figure on planting for wood production but would prefer to focus on ensuring that there was no net loss of conifers.

Olly Hughes, Managing Director of Gresham House, said: "There is so much positivity around the sector and the necessity to grow trees, but at the moment we are still falling short." He highlighted the fact that investors, such as pension funds, are sending their money overseas and we needed to capture the huge interest in supporting natural capital and forestry, and through providing clarity and certainty see that money invested in the UK.

SCOTTISH FORESTRY SUMMIT 'MUST BE A SPRINGBOARD'

The Scottish Woodland Creation Summit must act as a springboard to deliver the clarity, commitment and consistency needed to achieve ambitious planting targets, Confor believes.

Leaders from 80 businesses and organisations in the forestry, land-use, community and environment sectors met in Scotland for a Woodland Creation Summit, convened by Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, amid concerns around falling planting rates and policy drift away from industry support.

Ahead of the event at Battleby, Perth, Confor was looking for the Cabinet Secretary to give clear political support to achieving the Government's tree planting target of 18,000 hectares annually by 2025, with productive forestry playing the key role in that. Just 8,190 hectares were planted in 2022/23.

Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall said: "We were pleased Mairi Gougeon committed to meeting the targets, and pledged that productive forestry would be at the heart of future planting plans. That is vital if we are to secure future timber supply, which we need to support efforts to make construction greener and more sustainable by using more wood.

"This not only supports Scotland's climate ambitions [its net zero target is 2045, five years earlier than the rest of the UK] but it can also provide many more rural jobs."

Mr Goodall, who attended the summit with Confor colleagues Andy Leitch (Deputy CEO), and April Armstrong (National Manager for Scotland), added: "We now need to work together to ensure the commitment to succeed made by all parties at the summit is the springboard needed to get planting back on track.

"Ms Gougeon welcomed Confor's work to develop and deliver training in stakeholder engagement, and we're also working on best practice guidance. We need the application process to be more clearly and consistently administered, with fixed timelines that are adhered to, and the whole process would benefit from greater interaction between those working in the

public and private sectors.

"There was also discussion of the need for better communication about the drivers for planting and the benefits it provides and I'm pleased to say that Confor will have more to say on that in the new year."

Mr Goodall said the timing of the summit was excellent, after the positive announcement about wood use at COP28, where a coalition of 17 countries - including the UK - committed to "advancing policies and approaches that support low carbon construction and increase the use of wood from sustainably managed forests in the built environment" by 2030. Mr Goodall said: "This statement has to focus minds on why productive planting is so important to the future of our environment, as well as our rural economy."

Ahead of the summit, Confor liaised with members to pull together the key actions needed to help reach the target. "It was great to see strong representation from industry and to hear real-life stories from those on the ground," said Mr Goodall. "The next step is for Scottish Forestry to distil the points made and come up with prioritised actions; we hope that will be done quickly, including identifying potential quick wins."

Scottish Forestry has approved 13,111 ha worth of new woodland creation schemes so far this year.

Mairi Gougeon said at the event: "The summit is hugely important to help galvanise support and effort to increase our woodland creation levels. I am here at the summit to both listen, but also to ask what more everyone else can do. I'm very encouraged at the number of application approvals hitting a record this century – that's a tremendous achievement. However, although the approvals are very encouraging, we need to acknowledge that we still have a way to go in meeting the actual targets. More work by everyone on this is needed."

WARM WELCOME FOR TIMBER IN CONSTRUCTION ROADMAP

A new plan to use more timber in UK construction has been warmly welcomed by Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall.

Stuart Goodall said the publication of the Timber in Construction Roadmap – just four days after the National Wood Strategy for England was launched – created "a fantastic platform to deliver the potential of home-grown timber".

Confor was a partner in the creation of the document, which was published as ministers discussed urbanisation at COP28 in Dubai.

Around 25% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions are from the built environment, and larger buildings can store up to 400% more carbon when built out of engineered timber products rather than concrete.

"It's very clear that increasing domestic timber production and using more timber in construction will significantly reduce emissions from the built environment and lock up carbon in buildings, helping the UK on its path to net zero by 2050," said Mr Goodall. "At the same time, developing the wood-based economy can create rural jobs and economic growth across the UK.

"The roadmap creates a fantastic platform to deliver the potential of home-grown timber, especially alongside the National Wood Strategy for England, which the industry launched at our London policy conference. This is another clear sign that policymakers are embracing the role of timber in green growth – and are committed, to use the title of our conference last week, to making sure wood is recognised as the missing low-carbon link."

Mr Goodall said that UK wood producers, given continued support and encouragement from the UK Government, would help supply quality wood products to reduce the UK's increasing reliance on imports, contribute positively to decarbonising the construction sector, and create more high value manufacturing jobs and businesses in rural England. "A key part of this will be securing an increased future supply of wood from England's forests," he added.

Forestry Minister Rebecca Pow MP said: "Investing in timber is investing in growth and levelling up. The built environment is responsible for a huge proportion of UK carbon emissions, and using home-grown timber in construction is key to reducing emissions.

"Promoting the use of timber as a building material is a key part of the government's Net Zero Strategy. It will innovate the economy, play a role in creating green jobs and also help meet our tree-planting targets."

Forestry Commission Chief Executive Richard Stanford said: "If we are to achieve net zero, we must produce more timber through home grown trees and lock up carbon using the timber in our buildings. We need to boost productive forestry in England to support timber security and reduce our over-reliance on imports at the same time as tackling our nature crisis by improving biodiversity, improving water quality and giving people access to green spaces.

"We look forward to working closely with partners across the timber, forestry and construction industries in this hugely important area of our work for years to come."

KEY ACTIONS SET OUT IN THE ROADMAP INCLUDE:

- Improving data on timber and whole life carbon
- Promoting timber as a construction material
- Boosting skills, capacity and competency across the supply chain
- Increasing the supply of sustainable timber products
- Addressing fire safety concerns to safely expand the use of engineered mass timber
- Building collaboration with insurers, lenders, and warranty providers
- Promoting innovation and high performing timber construction systems

CONFOR LAUNCHES STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME IN SCOTLAND

In response to calls from industry, Confor has worked closely with members and consultants Aigas Associates to develop a training programme focused on engagement issues that may delay planting schemes.

As we seek to increase woodland expansion and creation in Scotland, potential areas of tension with other land users and communities often arise. Those in the forestry sector need to be prepared to tackle these issues and engage stakeholders at all stages.

Confor has been working with its members to identify best practice approaches and is now able to offer a stakeholder engagement training course for the sector. Designed and tested by industry representatives to be appropriate and relevant to industry practitioners, the first series of the courses will be running across Scotland in 2023/24.

The course aims to set the policy context for why engagement is a vital part of the planning and application process and will provide tools and techniques to help delegates carry out effective engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

By the end of the course, delegates will be able to:

- Explain the context for stakeholder engagement in forestry in Scotland;
- Access and utilise industry information to explain why the sector plants and harvests trees;
- Utilise the skills learnt on the course to:
  - identify and analyse stakeholders for a project;
  - plan and deliver tailored and appropriate stakeholder engagement;
  - improve the quality of stakeholder feedback.

The training programme is being supported in part by Scottish Forestry and has been met enthusiastically by Cabinet Secretary Mairi Gougeon.

She said: "Scotland's tree planting targets are a vitally important part of meeting our commitment to achieve net zero by 2045, and I strongly welcome Confor developing this training on stakeholder engagement. It's an important part of the application process and I'm glad that Scottish Forestry is supporting its delivery across the country.

"I strongly encourage anyone from the forestry sector who engages with communities and other stakeholders to participate in the training, and I look forward to receiving feedback from Confor on how it has been delivered and received in the sector."

The course is being delivered by our partners, Aigas Associates. Amanda Bryan MICFor is an experienced lecturer and trainer who has worked in the forestry sector for two decades and in wider land management, rural and community development for over 30 years. During this time, she has been responsible for leading on a wide range of stakeholder engagement processes often on contentious issues. Claire Glaister FICFor is a Regional Timber Transport Group Project Officer and a part time Woodland Officer with Scottish Forestry. She is involved with stakeholder engagement on a day-to-day basis and brings experience and perspective from both the public and private sectors of the industry.

Places on the course are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. The full programme, which includes an online Q&A with typical stakeholders, an in-person workshop, and access to a hub of online resources, costs £150 (+VAT) per delegate. Spaces are still available on the following courses in 2024:

- Perth
- Inverurie
- Newton St Boswells
- Barony

Please check the Events section of the Confor website for registration deadlines at each location and instructions on how to join a course near you.

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ELAINE HARRISON JOINS CONFOR AS NEW NATIONAL MANAGER FOR WALES

Elaine has taken up the role of National Manager for Wales at Confor, representing Members across the country and leading on regional issues in the industry.

Elaine joins Confor after more than five years with Natural Resources Wales (Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru) (NRW), working on forest operations and delivering sustainable management of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate.

She studied at Aberystwyth University in the Agricultural department, specialising in countryside management, then moved into the commercial horticultural sector after graduation. This work involved tree surveys and management of veteran trees.

Making the move into forestry, she started with NRW in 2018 as a Harvesting Contracts Manager, delivering on harvesting, restocking and establishment. She was later promoted to the role of Senior Office, Forest Operations which gave her experience in strategic planning of the forest and the operations programme

Elaine represented NRW on the FISA Chainsaw working group and chaired the internal restocking and establishment group. During this time, she also studied for a MSc in Forestry with Bangor University and gained her MICFor classification with the ICF.

Elaine has already gotten involved with members in Wales, meeting with the Welsh Confor Committee and various groups, as well as making contact with Welsh Government to establish a good working relationship going forward.

"ELAINE LOOKS FORWARD TO USING HER ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM FOR OUR SECTOR TOGETHER WITH HER EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE TO WORK ON EVERYONE'S COMMON GOAL"

This was acknowledged by Gail Merriman, Head of Timber Industrial Strategy for the Welsh Government, at Confor's December policy conference.

She noted that she had already seen Elaine talk on a panel as part of Wales Climate Week, discussing how to involve the breadth of the industry in 'Making Wood Work for Wales'.

Elaine looks forward to using her energy and enthusiasm for our sector together with her experience and expertise to work on everyone's common goal: to improve and expand forestry in Wales.

MEMBER UPDATE

OUR BEST WISHES FOR THE NEW YEAR

Eliza Hibbins-Cline, Membership & Marketing Manager

As we approach the end of 2023, I wanted to take this time to remind Members that they have access to Dell discounts! This includes discounts on laptops, accessories and more! Please feel free to take advantage of the discounts in the Members Area and if you have any issue with using them, please let me know.

I also hope that you have received your 2024 diary, ready for the new year! If you haven't or would like an extra copy, please email me at eliza@confor.org.uk.

A big thank you to those who have paid for their 2023/24 subscription already. We are a small team, so we really appreciate you paying up in a timely manner to save our administration time. To those who haven't paid I would kindly urge you to do so, as your membership will be lapsed in the new year if no payment is received.

It was lovely seeing some of you at the Policy Conference, I hope it was a beneficial event for you. Next, we have our annual Confor Dinner and Awards which will be held in Edinburgh on 12 March 2024! Make sure to book your place via our website now! If you have any queries, please get in touch.

Finally, a warm welcome to our newest Members from across the UK!

Scotland: SM Forestry Ltd, Ian Robb Timber Harvesting ltd, Christison Forestry Consulting Ltd, B J W Keen Forestry & Conservation, Ms V Hamilton, Mr B Goodall (student) and Mr B Harvey. **Wales:** Mr S Brown, Miss H Jenkins and Mr M Evans. **England:** Mr J Stevens (student), Mr S Wilson, Stanley Beck Woodland, Andrew Pickup Forestry Ltd, Mr J Herbert (student), Syngenta UK Ltd, Cultura Connect, Ms F Jones, Ms J Webb, Westerkirk Forestry, Mr A Alcock (student), C P Operations Limited, Miss S Hill, Mr J Reece, Grey Bear Construction Ltd and Broom Wood.

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CONFOR MOURNS THE LOSS OF MUCH VALUED EX-COLLEAGUE ROLAND STIVEN

Roland Stiven, formerly Confor Company Secretary and Timber Transport Forum lead, sadly passed away in November after a short illness. **Stuart Goodall** shares memories and condolences.

Roland spent over 10 years working with Confor, and in that time two things were constant – he navigated the intricacies of his job with apparent ease, and everyone liked and respected him. Most likely the two things were related.

Roland joined in July 2009 to take on the role of Timber Transport Officer, a role with partnership building at its heart. Those who planted the forests of last century had not always factored in how the timber would be extracted when mature, and local communities – unused to seeing big timber wagons in their villages and rural roads, were rarely pleased by it.

Throw into the mix resource-poor local councils, and forest owners and businesses desperate to sell or buy the trees, then it soon became a challenging environment in which to find solutions and keep a wide range of people happy - at least some of the time!

Characteristically, Roland applied a calm focus, was able to speak to a wide range of people with differing views - often strongly held, and progress was made. He combined a calm approach with intelligence and an ability to deal with people, to listen, and to gain their confidence. When he left Confor and the timber transport role in December 2020 to join Scottish Forestry, everyone wished him the best and was sad to see him leave. Everyone had a good word, or many good words, to say about Roland.

Of course, Roland had a full life outside of Confor. He was born in Karachi in 1965, the son of a poet and a Church of Scotland minister. With his three sisters he was brought up in Edinburgh before taking a degree in Forestry at Aberdeen, graduating in 1988. He then pursued a varied career with spells working oversees, beginning with VSO for two years in Sierra Leone. He also spent time in Fiji, Kenya and China and secured an MSc in Natural Resource Management from Edinburgh University.

Before joining Confor, Roland worked for Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, and the National Trust for Scotland, and on a list of projects as long as his arm – compiling his CV must have been a project in itself. And he undoubtedly applied and honed his skills in that varied time.

Outside of forestry, Roland was strongly influenced by two year-long stints working at the Brandeau vineyard and would return there again, most recently with his youngest son, and while at Confor he spoke often of Raasay, where he lived and was a focal point for getting the Village Hall built. Another project where Roland's people skills and patience could be brought to bear with great effect.

Roland was effusive about the role that trees and timber could contribute to tackling climate change, and he was also keen to do what he could to make the sector even more carbon positive in its own activities – discussing circular economy principles and setting up the first trial of electric lorries in the country while working with Scottish Forestry. In this last role before he passed away, Roland was ready to make his mark again and I'm sure he would have done that, taking people with him and making it all look like quite effortless – belying the passion and determination that ran within him.

Everyone at Confor, and in the wider industry, who knew Roland and worked with him has spoken about him with great fondness as a person and with great respect for his various roles in the sector. We were lucky to have him in our industry.

Roland is survived by his wife Anna, and his three children Lily, Rueben and Dara.

BOOK NOW TO GUARANTEE A SPOT AT APF 2024

More than 100 exhibitors have already secured their place at APF 2024, returning to the Ragley Estate, Warwickshire on 19-21 September.

The APF Exhibition is the UK's largest forestry, woodland, arboriculture, firewood, fencing, trees and timber trade show. APF 2022 was a huge success with over 300 exhibitors and 23,000 visitors attending, some from as far afield as Japan and the USA.

Similar numbers are expected for the upcoming 2024 show and booking forms are now available at www.apfexhibition.co.uk.

Confor members benefit from a 10% discount off standard site fees. This is a big saving of £250 on a 15m frontage static site or £470 off a 40m demo site. Please make sure your membership details are up-to-date to take advantage of this offer.

Demand is already high for space and Exhibition Secretary Ian Millward has urged potential exhibitors to book early to secure a prime site and benefit from the best rates.

He said: "It is fantastic to already have over 100 exhibitors booked in for next year, 12 months ahead of the event. It emphasises that the APF show is still regarded to be the best place to sell machinery and equipment into the arb, forestry and fencing sectors and we look forward to seeing all our 2022 exhibitors return."

Happy Christmas from the Oakleaf Forestry Team. Thank you to all our valued customers, your trust and support has been the driving force behind our success, and for that, we are truly thankful.

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CELEBRATE LEADERS, INNOVATORS, AND CHAMPIONS OF THE SECTOR IN 2024

Nominations for the Confor Awards 2024 are now open for submissions. Our judges are looking for Confor Members, individuals or businesses, with achievements in any of four categories:

Future Leader
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Changing Attitudes
This award is presented to an individual, business or organisation promoting the forestry and wood sector in a positive, impactful way - through personal engagement, campaigning or communication, social media, or other ways.
Sponsored by Scottish Woodlands.

Science & Technology
This award is presented to an individual, business or organisation at the cutting edge of technological innovations and/or scientific advancements which benefit the forestry and wood industry.
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This award is presented to an individual, business or organisation making a specific and measurable contribution to the forestry and wood industry's efforts to deliver the UK's net zero ambitions.
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Winners will be announced at the annual Confor Dinner & Awards, returning to Surgeons Quarter, Edinburgh, on 12 March 2024. Tickets for the event are available to book now.

The Institue of Chartered Foresters (ICF) will also be announcing the **Professional Forester of the Year** award at the event. This award recognises Chartered members for their outstanding service to the profession of forestry and for furthering the principles of the Institute. Details on how to nominate are available on the ICF website.

We are also pleased to announce we will be accepting nominations for the prestigious **Confor Dedicated Service to Forestry** award. If you would like to nominate someone for this honour, please send the nominee's name to stuartg@confor.org.uk and explain:

- How the individual has gone above and beyond in their contributions to the success of the forestry and wood industry.
- Details on the wider benefits and impact of their work on the forestry and wood sector.
- How this individual's approach and achievements stand out against other individuals in the forestry and wood sector.

Entry Criteria & Award information

Submit a nomination at https://bit.ly/41u5SpG or download an entry form to enter by email. All submissions must be received by 26 January 2024.

- All nominees must be currently working in the forestry and wood-using sector.
- You do not have to be a Confor Member to submit a nomination.
- Being nominated or shortlisted in previous years does not prohibit a nominee from being nominated again.
- Judges may, where appropriate, move entries to another category better suited to the nomination submitted.
- Nominees will be contacted by Confor after entries close.
- Category shortlists will be announced in the February 2024 edition of *Forestry & Timber News*.
- Winners will be announced at the Confor Dinner & Awards 2024.

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RTS Forestry welcomes MSP to Crieff HQ

A Perthshire forestry company welcomed the local MSP to hear about the growth of its business – and the potential for further expansion in the industry to deliver major economic and environmental benefits to rural Scotland.

Jim Fairlie, SNP MSP for Perthshire South and Kinross-shire, visited the head office of RTS Forestry, which is based in Crieff and celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2024.

The company offers a wide range of services from forest management to timber harvesting, and supplies biomass to a wide range of public facilities and private businesses. It is part of a Scotland-wide forestry and wood industry worth £1 billion annually to the economy and which employs well over 25,000 people.

Managing Director Norman O'Neill explained to Mr Fairlie that RTS Woodfuel, which has functioned as a division of the company since 2007, is now producing more than 34,000 tonnes of renewable energy woodchip annually and supplies a wide range of 100-plus commercial and domestic local customers.

Mr O'Neill said: "We were very pleased to welcome Jim Fairlie to head office and give him an insight to our forestry management business, which now operates with offices across Scotland and into northern England. With an overall staff of 52, we are proud to have seen the continued development of RTS over recent years and to have become a major local employer with over 30 staff in the Crieff area.

"The whole forestry sector is on the up with increased timber felling and new woodland planting. One big challenge for us now is attracting more people into forestry where there are great employment opportunities across our modern and diverse industry."

The visit was arranged by Confor. Chief Executive Stuart Goodall stressed that planting more trees and using more wood could deliver an economic and environmental double-whammy for Scotland.

Mr Goodall said: "With COP28 taking place in Dubai at the time of the visit, this was the perfect time to discuss how forestry and wood processing can do even more to help achieve the Scottish Government's ambitious target for net zero by 2045.

"Planting fast-growing trees for wood production will lock up the most carbon by 2045. By locking up that carbon in timber frames and throughout houses, then planting more trees in their place, we can also provide long-term, well-paid jobs across Scotland's rural economy.

"Realising that ambition will require co-operation between the industry, Parliament and Government, and it was great to meet with Jim Fairlie to discuss how that can be highlighted at Holyrood."

Jim Fairlie MSP said: "I was delighted to meet with representatives from Confor and RTS Forestry, a very important local company in my constituency.

"The wide-ranging discussions took in everything from the need for timber, environmental concerns, the need for better engagement in the farming community but probably most importantly, the incredible potential that the £1 billion forestry timber industry represents for Scotland.

"The silo thinking that it's a choice of either trees or farming isn't necessarily the case, and I am very keen to work with stakeholders from all sectors to maximise the opportunities that are available right now. That should result in Scotland importing far less of its timber needs and creating a vibrant sector that employs even more people in well paid highly skilled jobs."

Confor welcomes COP28 announcements on using more wood

A coalition of 17 countries – including the UK – committed to "advancing policies and approaches that support low carbon construction and increase the use of wood from sustainably managed forests in the built environment" by 2030.

The announcement was made at a COP Presidency event under the auspices of the Forests and Climate Leaders Partnership (FCLP) which is co-chaired by the United States Special Presidential Climate Envoy, John Kerry and the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources for Ghana, Samuel Jinapor.

Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall welcomed the announcement, which came on the eve of Confor's annual policy conference, Green Growth: Why Wood is the Missing Low-Carbon Link.

He said: "The COP28 statement is both extremely welcome and very timely, as the forestry and wood sector met in London to discuss the value, and huge opportunities, of using far more home-grown wood in construction – an opportunity that has been largely over-looked until recently.

"It is crucial for countries to move quickly to lower carbon emissions and increase stored carbon by using far more timber in buildings."

New trees on farms publication for farmers and crofters

A new concise and informative publication for farmers and crofters which summarises the economic and environmental benefits trees can provide has been published by the Integrating Trees Network.

'Why Trees?' aims to gives simple advice to those considering whether integrating trees into their farm or croft business is right for them.

The Scottish Government is keen to encourage more farmers and crofters to gain the benefits of growing trees. Around half of all new woodland creation applications submitted to Scottish Forestry are for small scale projects, mainly from farmers and crofters.

Welcoming the new factsheet, Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon said: "Last June I announced a package of measures which would encourage new planting across Scotland. Part of this included a commitment to provide more advice and information to farmers and crofters to stimulate further interest in growing trees.

"This new publication aims to pull together all the key benefits, including the economic and environmental advantages, that trees can provide for farmers and crofters into one easy reading document.

"It's a great place to start if you are thinking about growing trees for the first time and need a few pointers to help decide if integrating trees into your farm or croft is going to benefit the business."

Benefits of trees on farms are wide ranging and can include shelter and shade for livestock, windbreaks for crops, pollination, new income streams, mitigating climate change, improving water quality and biodiversity.

Help and advice on planting trees is available through a number of sources including the Integrating Trees Network, which is supported by Scottish Forestry and the Scottish Government.

The network has been a growing success in recent years with nine active volunteer farming and crofting hosts around Scotland, all using their farms or crofts to demonstrate the multiple benefits of having trees on your land.

A number of on-site events and webinars have been organised through the Integrating Trees Network in the past and more are set to take place this year.

Improved funding for English land managers and farmers to grow more trees

Changes designed help drive tree planting rates across the country and to support farmers and landowners grow more trees have come into effect for the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) and Countryside Stewardship (CS) schemes.

The key highlights include:

- Funding for land managers and farmers will increase, helping to support the creation of more resilient and better managed woodland.
- The number of years government will pay maintenance for will increase from 10 years to 15 years. These additional five years of support will support land managers with their longer-term activities to maintain new woodlands, helping ensure the trees are cared for and become fully established.
- An extended Capital Window from two to three for EWCO. Increasing the window for capital activities ensures all customers have two whole planting seasons to deliver their scheme, regardless of the start date of their agreement. This will provide additional flexibility for planning work, securing trees and materials, and responding to weather conditions.

Commenting on the reasoning behind the changes, Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley said: "As woodland creation increases across the country, we want to make sure the trees we do plant are well managed and resilient against future threats such as climate change or tree pests and diseases. It's vital that once planted, new woodlands are well looked after.

"We've listened to sector feedback on payment rates and timescales. The changes brought in today will give land managers two seasons to complete the planting and give longer term financial support to manage woodlands in the important early years of establishment. This will play an essential part in creating resilient forests and woodlands which improve our natural environment, help meet net zero carbon emissions, provide a sustainable source of home-grown timber and boost people's health and wellbeing."

This announcement follows a range of recent changes to improve the woodland creation process, including the Ministerial consultation reform, designed to reduce the complexity and length of time it takes to apply to speed up getting trees in the ground. Further improvements have also been made to EWCO applications, such as a new and improved application form, with more changes expected in the coming months.

The government has set stretching targets to increase tree canopy and woodland cover in England to 16.5% by 2050. Tree planting will play an important role in halting nature's decline by 2030 and meeting net zero emissions by 2050. It will also be vital in achieving wider priorities including improving water quality, reducing flooding, creating green jobs, and better connecting people with nature.

FORESTRY GRANT RATES IN SCOTLAND INCREASE TO HELP TACKLE INFLATION

Scottish Forestry is increasing the level of forestry grant support to help counter recent inflationary pressures, particularly for smaller woodland creation projects.

Forestry grants in Scotland will rise by around 20% for planting most smaller scale woodlands. The announcement came in advance of the Woodland Creation Summit held in December 2023.

The increase in grant rates will include a number of new measures across the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS). Some key new changes include:

- An extra £750 per ha for the first 40ha of woodland creation in most parts of Scotland;
- Extending the high-cost deer fencing option throughout Scotland and increasing this from £2.30 per metre to £9.90 per metre;
- Reducing the minimum specification for the small or farm woods option to make it more accessible to farmers and crofters wanting to plant woodlands of up to 10ha;
- Sheep and Trees schemes, which combine funding for woodland creation with forestry & farm road accesses, will now be allowed in the Central Scotland Green Network area;
- Tripling the grant for manual or mechanical bracken control from £225 to £720 per ha.

The latter measure is being implemented as a result of chemical control of bracken using Asulox not being authorised for use this season, due to potential environmental and health risks. Mechanical and manual methods, involving machine or hand rolling, cutting or whipping, are being boosted by this grant change instead.

Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon said: "As I set out in June when the national planting targets were published, I'm keen to provide more support to help address inflation costs as that is having a direct impact for many on their ability to start growing trees.

"With a large percentage of new woodlands being created by farmers and crofters it is important that we support them as best we can. This increase in grant support should help alleviate some of the rising costs for materials which has been a barrier for some.

"WITH A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF NEW WOODLANDS BEING CREATED BY FARMERS AND CROFTERS IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE SUPPORT THEM AS BEST WE CAN."
Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon

"Bracken is the most common fern in the UK and is widespread in Scotland's rainforest zone. It's often found on sites well suited to growing trees where it spreads and regenerates very quickly, making it very difficult and costly for anyone wishing to establish a new woodland.

"The tripling of the grant rate will make a significant contribution to the costs involved in controlling bracken at a time when the cost of living is proving difficult. Ultimately this will help in getting new trees in the ground, resulting in a welcome boost to our yearly woodland creation targets."

Also amongst the new measures to the FGS is a doubling of the payment for expanding native woodland through natural regeneration. This new increased grant rate covers the whole of Scotland and stands at £600 per hectare. This action will stimulate further woodland growth and help in the yearly native woodland targets set out in the Bute House Agreement.

Brendan Callaghan, Director of Operational Delivery at Scottish Forestry added: "The Forestry Grant Scheme is a key driver in boosting tree planting and natural regeneration projects across the country.

"We have listened carefully to the responses in the recent forestry grant consultation and during our regular meetings with stakeholders. As a direct result, we have embarked on the most significant changes to the FGS since it was established in 2015 and plan to keep developing the scheme to support the growth of woodlands in Scotland."

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CONSERVATION BENEFITS OF REAL CHRISTMAS TREES REVEALED

British Christmas tree plantations have been found to support various species of conservation concern, such as red squirrels and polecats, according to the first ever study of its kind undertaken in the UK.

Biodiversity was scrutinised at sites across the UK in a study commissioned by the British Christmas Tree Growers Association (BCTGA) to better understand the role that plantations play in providing habitats and supporting native wildlife.

The first set of results were revealed last year after the survey was carried out throughout 2022. Now, the second raft of results have been rolled out from this ground-breaking new research led by Colin Palmer, BCTGA Technical Advisor, with support from Nick Covarr, a Forestry & Woodland Management Consultant and lecturer at Harper Adams University.

The average 6ft Christmas tree takes 10 years to grow and attracts a wealth of wildlife during its growing cycle. Christmas trees are grown specifically to be harvested and for each one that's cut, another tree is planted, providing a truly cyclical, sustainable process. Over eight million Christmas trees were sold in 2021.

The latest results show fascinating details on the numbers and types of wildlife found in British Christmas tree plantations and highlight the importance they have as part of the countryside environment. Well-managed plantations were found to support insects, arachnids, and both native and migratory birds.

The study found that, by linking arable areas used to grow food crops, with patches of scrub and woodland, Christmas tree plantations contribute to the availability and maintenance of these green corridors which encourage the free movement of many wildlife species.

Declining native songbird populations were found to benefit from shelter and food sources offered by Christmas tree plantations when they are placed in conjunction with native woodland, scrub, grasslands, and arable fields. Red List bird species of conservation concern, including lapwing, skylark, linnets and redpolls were also identified.

"THE AVERAGE 6FT CHRISTMAS TREE TAKES 10 YEARS TO GROW AND ATTRACTS A WEALTH OF WILDLIFE DURING ITS GROWING CYCLE."

Rory Young, Chairman of BCTGA, said: "This is a highly significant study which provides further evidence for why buying a local sustainably grown British Christmas tree is supporting nature and the environment.

"The study demonstrates, perhaps for the very first time, that many and varied species inhabit and pass through British Christmas tree plantations, and that their sensitive management can boost numbers of endangered native species by creating a mosaic of important habitats that promote biodiversity and healthy ecosystems."

Many of the species detected by the surveys, which were carried out across BCTGA members' sites across the UK in 2022, contribute to a natural hierarchy of predator and prey and so support a balanced environment.

Other key findings include:

- The dominant species found in trees were springtails, tiny arthropods that feed on microrobes, bacteria and fungi that can spread disease. Ladybirds and lacewings

Red squirrels and Polecats are two of the many species that benefit from Christmas tree plantations.

are also drawn to Christmas trees to prey on aphids.

- The next most numerous species found in the trees were small spiders which feed on aphids, mites and caterpillars, helping to prevent the spread of diseases and providing valuable food for birds.
- On the ground, six species of beetle were found, which are important for consuming crop pests such as slugs and aphids.
- Cultivation of low-growing, flowering plants such as clover around the base of trees, as well as wildflowers in headlands and brambles and scrub around borders of plantations greatly benefit bees and other flying pollinators.
- A total of 800 moths, representing 100 different species were detected, as were 1,524 frogs.

The BCTGA offers an up-to-date online directory of where to buy the best quality Christmas trees locally from sustainable plantations ion their website.

A NORTHERN POWERHOUSE OF WOODLANDS

From encouraging forestry micro-businesses to inspiring children and empowering young people, the Royal Forestry Society's Excellence in Forestry Awards show how forestry and woodland projects across the North of England are leading the way.

Presenting the Awards at Ushaw House in Durham, Royal Forestry Society President Ben Herbert said: "These awards have uncovered some truly remarkable projects from which others around the country will be able to learn.

"From an estate in Cumbria encouraging a local economy where more people work in forestry than farming, to a Community Interest Company in Gateshead which is supporting young people into careers they never thought possible, these awards are revealing how new thinking can transform woodlands and lives."

The Awards shift focus to a new region every year, putting a spotlight on the great work being done across the UK.

Among the 2023 winners s Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley, whose Yorkshire based Hovingham Estate picked up silver in two categories. Unable to attend the presentations, he commented: "I have enjoyed spending time in the woods at Hovingham ever since I was a child, and I hope that they will continue to be an attractive place for many years to come. As well as producing quality timber, I have maintained the strong emphasis on amenity and biodiversity."

Other winners include Snowden Close, owned by Ash Moss Limited and managed by Pryor & Rickett Silviculture, Stomping Grounds Forest School in Gateshead, and Witherslack Woodlands in Cumbria, owned by Nicholas Stanley.

The Excellence in Forestry Awards are sponsored by Forestry Journal, FSC, PEFC, Savills, Tilhill, Trees Please and The Woodland Trust.

Forestry leaders must collaborate to improve public perception about the sector

Forestry leaders must band together to change public attitudes to spruce trees and commercial forestry, conference delegates heard at the launch of an industry report last month.

The call came as experts from Tilhill and Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group highlighted the fall in tree planting in the past year at the launch of The UK Forest Market Report 2023.

Just 13,000 hectares of trees were planted this year, a drop of 7% and 43% of the national target of 30,000 hectares. While Scotland continued to lead the charge with 8,200 hectares planted – more than two thirds of which were conifers – this was a 27% drop from 10,400ha in 2022. Broadleaf planting amounted to 51% of all UK tree planting.

Xander Mahony, Head of Forestry Investment at Tilhill, said the industry needed to work together to change negative public perceptions about Sitka spruce, in order to be able to meet the urgent need to grow more UK timber and meet climate mitigation obligations.

He likened it to previous farming campaigns raising awareness about where milk came from and said there was "a similar disconnect".

"People want things made out of wood," he said. "Wood looks nice, we have our buildings made out of CLT (cross-laminated timber) but they don't connect that to growing good Sitka in plantations and so breaking through that communication barrier and making that connection is really important.

"It is something we need to figure out because we sit here feeling like we're doing something good for the world and getting punished for it and that's not a pleasant position to be in. We need to band together and work out how to change that."

He suggested planting more trees provided a solution. "I think it is because we have a deficit of trees in the UK, and we are planting relatively little compared to what we already have. It's as though we are fighting over the scraps with people looking at conifer plantations which are quite big in size and asking why they're not native woodland.

"The fact is we want both and if we were planting more trees and had an abundance of trees than perhaps the productive components wouldn't seem so out of place."

Jon Lambert, partner at Goldcrest, told the conference that people shied away from change but that there was scope for more tree planting. "There is undoubtedly more room for more trees and working with our politicians to provide financial reward for people planting trees is hugely important to the industry. There are many opportunities out there if people want more timber."

The report found that commercial forestry values fell for the first time in almost a decade with a 10%-20% drop in the past year.

The report said: "Compared to the rampaging run of forestry as an asset class over the last 17 years, the lagging effect of economic turmoil from the mini budget, the war in Ukraine, and rising interest rates have softened market activity across the board in both afforestation and commercial/amenity woodlands."

While highlighting the enduring "resilience" of UK forestry, the continuing emergence of new investors and confidence in the long-term future of timber underpinned by the need to replace plastic, steel and concrete with sustainable forest products, the report found that supply tightened, prices dropped, and buyers became increasingly selective in the last year. Additionally, demand for timber slowed sharply in the short-term leading to a dramatic reduction in processing volumes.

2023 saw £212m of commercial forestry listings on the open market, up 9%, with two properties accounting for an "extraordinary" 70% of the total value listed for sale and Scotland enjoying a 91% market share. However, the number of listings fell 39% to just 35 properties.

Mr Mahony said: "This continues the £200m observed market size trend into a fourth year. The headline number, however, is boosted by two huge assets (Griffin in Perthshire and Glen Shira in Argyll) and flatters a market that was otherwise unusually small."

Mr Lambert said that most properties brought to the market had still sold but that after a "staggering" run, pricing was down 10-20% depending on quality and location. "Purchasers are generally more cautious than 12 or 18 months ago, leading to longer due diligence periods, an increased demand to rectify 'blemishes' before completion and a desire for higher yields."

He highlighted a continuing demand for good quality planting land but said appropriate sites were hard to find. The total value of planting land listings amounted to £49.9m, down 24%.

In Scotland, average prices for planting land suitable for commercial forestry dropped 22% from £12,800 per gross hectare to £9,900 per gross hectare "in the most significant development across all forest market data this year".

It is hoped, according to the report, that a "normalisation in commercial planting land prices in Scotland would spur much needed woodland creation, both commercial and native" going forward.

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MEMBER Confor Promoting forestry and wood

Exciting career pathway into the forestry sector re-opened

The Professional Forester Apprenticeship programme offers an exciting career pathway into the forestry sector for people from all backgrounds.

Applications for the next cohort of the innovative Professional Forester Apprenticeship programme were re-opened by the Forestry Commission as part of National Tree Week.

The programme offers a three-year, paid development opportunity for individuals from all backgrounds looking to kickstart their careers in forestry. The apprenticeship aims to grow and upskill the forestry sector workforce and is open to school leavers, graduates or anyone looking for a change in career direction.

Forestry Commission Chief Executive Richard Stanford said: "The Professional Forester Apprenticeship programme is a fantastic opportunity to earn as you learn, with our current students thriving though a unique mix of hands-on experience and academic study that will equip them for a future in forestry, and help to address the skills shortage in the forestry sector.

"The Forestry Commission is leading the way with this unique development opportunity, and we continue to see first-hand the success of this programme. I encourage anyone interested to apply today to make a difference to our trees and woodlands for generations to come."

Professional Forester Apprentices will enjoy academic studies in forestry management at the University of Cumbria, hands-on experience in Forestry Commission area teams throughout England, and the potential of wider sector placements to further develop their skills and experience and improve future employment prospects.

Current Professional Forester Apprentice Marcus Ling attested: "For the last few years I was working in the arboriculture and garden landscaping industry. I was outside come rain or shine, working with a variety of tools. I really enjoyed this work, but wanted to increase my theoretical knowledge of trees, woodlands and nature. This apprenticeship enables me to study a university degree, learn from industry experts and still spend lots of my time outdoors.

"The best thing about the programme so far is the impact I am already having on the landscape, as I have been helping Woodland Officers to ensure that new planting is being undertaken responsibly and existing woodlands are managed carefully and all within my local area."

Upon completion of the programme, successful graduates will earn a Professional Forester Apprenticeship (equivalent to Level 6), a BSc (Hons) Professional Forester and will be able to apply for Chartered Forester status with the Institute of Chartered Foresters.

The programme will support jobs and opportunities in rural communities and help to increase capacity to meet woodland creation and forest management needs, which in turn will support the Government's tree planting and woodland creation ambitions over the coming years.

Dr Rob Hawkins, Senior Education and Outreach Officer at the Institute of Chartered Foresters, said: "We are delighted to see the launch of the third year of the Professional Forester Apprenticeship. This programme is a unique opportunity to gain hands-on experience alongside a BSc (Hons) degree, with the potential to gain chartered status too. It's an exciting time to be entering the sector and this initiative is an incredible way to get a head start in an amazing career".

Dr Helen Manns, Director of the Institute of Science and Environment at the University of Cumbria, added: "The University of Cumbria is committed to delivering higher-level and industry relevant skills through programmes developed collaboratively with employers and sector bodies. The Professional Forester degree-level apprenticeship is an excellent example of this approach.

"We are delighted that we can help the Forestry Commission with an apprenticeship programme that supports their Development Woodland Officer Programme, working alongside them and other partners to expand the long-term capacity of the sector and to deliver national ambitions for a skilled workforce in the coming years."

The Forestry Commission are also looking to work with employers who are able to take on apprentices who will join the Forestry Commission apprentices cohort for the formal part of their training. The Forestry Commission may be able to help with the process and are happy to talk through what's involved.

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Lower inflation and potential interest rate cuts bolster enthusiasm

Mike Tustin MICfor MRICS and **John Clegg** FRICS of Tustins reflect on recent sales in England and Wales.

Focusing on the England and Wales woodland market, we are happily able to confirm that inflation is now the lowest it has been since 2021, with speculation that further interest rate rises in the coming months are unlikely. Our aim for this edition of Forestry and Timber News is to provide end of year commentary on the market as well as some examples of what has been achieved across a spectrum of sales agents who have been active in this area.

The uplift in activity we are now seeing in the England and Wales forestry market has been catalysed by the decision by the Bank of England in September to leave interest base rates untouched at 5.25%. That said, we should not reach for the celebratory fireworks just yet. Cautious optimism best describes the mood in the market at the present time.

This is reflected in the short supply of large commercial offerings – vendors are sometimes reluctant to market these as timber prices have dipped thus lowering buyers' appetites for above guide price offers. Who would have thought a few hours of high wind, now over two years ago, adding material to the market together with lower demand for timber from housebuilders would have such a lasting and oddly stable impact on what was, at the time, an increasingly exciting commodity market. The knock-on to the property market has been less acute but no less important.

Today, with the added prospect of Biodiversity Net Gain being a real potential woodland income generator in a wide cross section of the UK forestry resource, investors from new directions are also recognising the non-timber benefits in less productive woodlands as we approach the official launch date for this scheme. We are optimistic that this new approach to rewarding conservation activity should have a positive outcome in the lowland woodland sector which tends to be less commercial and a little more susceptible to vagaries of location or woodland quality.

With all this headline grabbing news, the autumn period has seen an uplift in sales activity in the English and Welsh woodland markets. From September we have seen notably increased activity in most wood-

lands in terms of viewings, telephone calls, offers and sales agreed.

In contrast to recent increased interest and activity, we have sadly also seen a slowing in the rate of land registry work. This is causing significant issues with the legal conveyancing process. To mitigate these delays – that sometimes extend transaction times by up to a year – and avoid buyers from withdrawing from their purchase we are now advising owners to direct their solicitors to look at woodland titles before marketing commences.

Our advice is for your solicitor to look into the titles as if they were buying it to iron out those title issues that you never got around to fixing when you purchased the property originally. Taking this proactive approach will improve your chances of a prompt sale and encourage buyers to be more confident with their offers.

Starting with the Welsh region, we have seen few larger-scale woodlands coming to the market in Wales this year. This is likely to be an indication of owner satisfaction together with a lack of investment opportunities elsewhere if woods are sold. The demand for good quality commercial woods of size in Wales remains strong and has undoubtedly been fuelled by the lack of product on offer.

On the sales front, Tustins' offering of Coed Glynclygrogwen near Machynlleth in Powys, a young to mid-rotation investment featuring about 70% Sitka spruce, Douglas fir and mixed conifers, plus land for restocking with softwoods demonstrated the demand for large commercial forestry. It completed recently in excess of the guide price of £1,800,000.

Tustins also offered Pen y Ceunant near Llanfyllin in Powys, an upland commercial forest of distinct quality, focused on Sitka spruce with the majority of the crops dating from 2018 and 2021 with about 22 acres to restock. The 106 acres sold in excess of £6,000 per acre.

The market in England has seen considerably more transactions albeit with a lack of large-scale pure Sitka spruce plantations. Looking at larger sales of over £1 million, Tustins' offering of Scratchmill Scar Forest, 222 acres to the north of Penrith, fetched in excess of the guide of £1,250,000. Crops were principally mature with larch and Scots pine dominating. The wood featured a sandstone quarry with redevelopment opportunities.

Reedshaw Moss in north Yorkshire surprised us. This impressive commercial spruce woodland planted in the 1970s on good conifer ground with superb vehicular access took time to sell. Falling timber prices at the time of launch and uncertainty around the stocked area were probably responsible for the timescale. A sale is now agreed after a potential buyer undertook

continued on p39

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continued from p37

extensive due diligence and survey work with a well-known forestry advisor.

Maer Hills, 477 acres in Staffordshire featured over 80% conifers, mainly pine, and a timber yard. Goldcrest offered the property seeking offers of £3,250,000. It is understood to have sold to a local conservation charity at a figure around the guide price.

Allums Grove & Haind Park Wood near Dymock in Gloucestershire is a superb multi-purpose woodland with large quantities of mature fir, spruce and timber quality oak with good access to both woods. Offered by Tustins, this 153 acres of woodland achieved around £9,500 per acre.

Barnett Wood in Herefordshire was an unusual offering. A single block of nearly 150 acres of very nicely managed mature broadleaves dominated by good quality oak, with excellent access. Competitive bidding resulted in a sale being agreed at above the guide price of £1,200,000 demonstrating that "quality sells".

"THE AUTUMN PERIOD HAS SEEN AN UPLIFT IN SALES ACTIVITY IN THE ENGLISH AND WELSH WOODLAND MARKETS."

The market for smaller woodlands has appeared to confuse many potential purchasers. The market for quality lower priced woods up to £100-150,000 in good locations remains strong. However, any properties with "warts" on the title or issues with the crops need to be realistically priced to sell.

The exclusion of sporting rights from a title is nearly always a strong negative for purchasers. This needs to be reflected in the guide price. In addition, disease in ash and the associated safety risks are now well known by the majority of woodland buyers and this is now impacting values where ash is dominant in a woodland.

Briggs & Stone jointly with Savills offered five woodlands as part of their sale of the Lee agricultural Estate. The Lee is a very popular Buckinghamshire village which has featured in Midsomer Murders. The five woodland lots ranged from 15 to 172 acres. Sales of all were agreed at an August closing date. Guide prices of between £7,600 and £8,750 per acre were exceeded on the four smaller lots, whilst the larger block is understood to have made close to the guide of £6,660 per acre.

Close by in the Chilterns in Buckinghamshire, Tustins offered the Ramscoat Wood Estate in three lots from 11 to 20 acres. Principally mid-rotation and maturing broadleaves, sales of two of the lots are now agreed at figures in excess of £9,000 per acre.

John Clegg & Co has agreed a sale of Whidcombe Brake in Somerset. The 25 acres of mature broadleaved woodland achieved in excess of the guide price of £145,000 whilst Tustins' offering of Gerbeston Wood just down the road at Wellington in Somerset saw sales agreed at and also above the guides of £175,000 (22 acres) and £125,000 (15 acres). Further to the west in Cornwall, John Clegg & Co has now agreed the sale of Lewarne Great Wood. Principally young commercial conifers with mixed broadleaves the wood is understood to have achieved over £5,500 per acre.

In Derbyshire at the Via Gellia Woods near Matlock Bruns, Griffe and Hopton's Woods demonstrated the range of values which can be attributed to woods and the danger of stating "woodlands are worth £x per acre". At 109 acres a sale was agreed at under £3,000 per acre. These sales probably reflected the concerns buyers have over ash on a largely roadside woodland.

In summary, following the quiet spring previously reported where newly launched properties were slow to sell, we are now seeing a resumption of activity albeit on the cautious side of 2022 levels. This assumes the pre-marketing due diligence period includes some time to understand a woodland's appeal to the wider market and any problems with title in order to price the wood accordingly.

With that we are optimistic we will see some larger commercial offerings coming forward that will now generate strong interest with only a slight price adjustment to cater for the lower but apparently stable timber market that we are now becoming used to.

INTERNATIONAL

Seán Lenihan, Kestrel Forestry Consultants Ltd

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

Seán looks at the outlook for forestry in the Republic of Ireland under a raft of new measures from the Government.

Ireland's new Afforestation programme 2023 -2027 finally got the green light in September this year, 10 months after being first announced, and unfortunately not having been in place for the 2022-23 planting season. Both the Minister for Agriculture Charlie McConalogue and the Junior Minister Pippa Hackett with responsibility for Forestry were buoyant as they declared the new programme was now officially open.

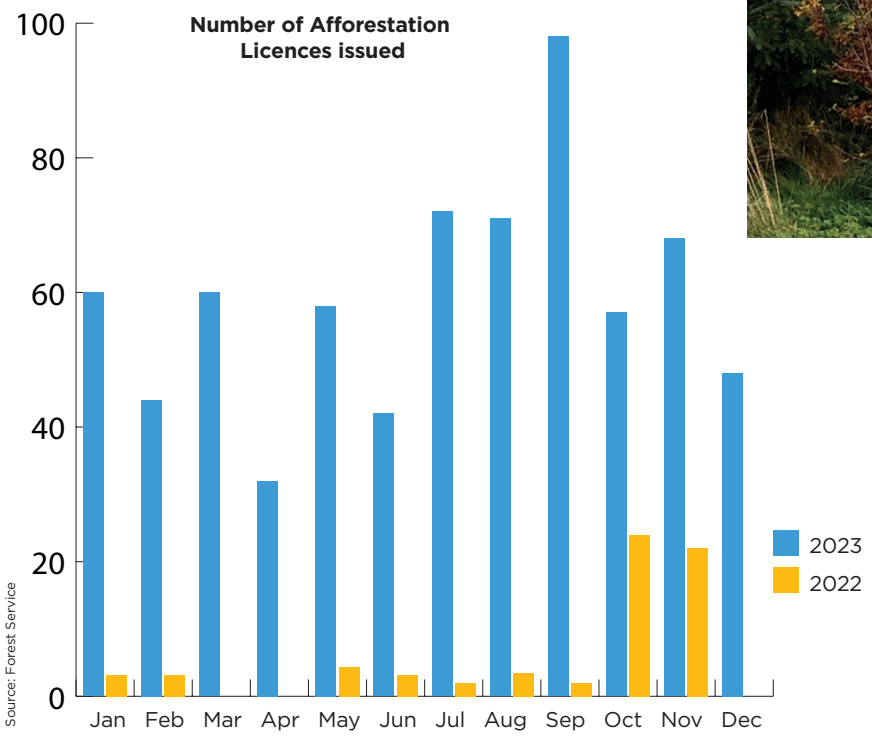
Minister Hackett said: "Since I took on this role in Government, I have set about fixing many of the legacy issues that have plagued forestry in recent years. From tackling licensing delays to the creation of an entirely new forestry programme, we have spent three years transforming systems and policies so that farmers and landowners can interact and commit to forestry in confidence, knowing that it is the right choice for their land, for their family's future and for the future of the planet "

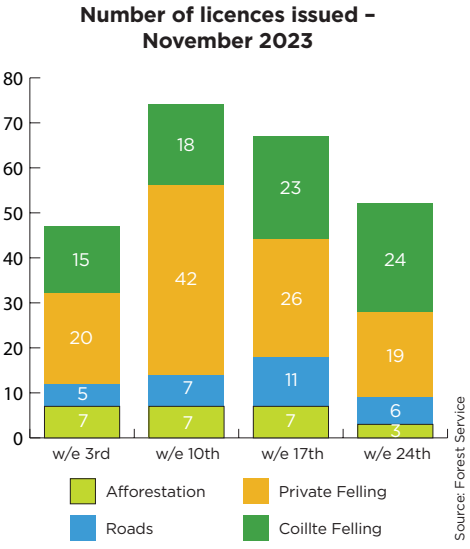
A month later, commenting on the Government's 2024 budget for forestry, she announced: "The new Forestry Programme is the most ambitious in the history of the State. Next year's funding of Đ110 million will provide a strong foundation to the sector so that we can increase annual planting levels from 2024. This package will get farmers planting trees as part of our efforts to reduce emissions and improve biodiversity and water quality, both through the Native Tree Area Scheme and through the wider Forestry Programme.

So, what could possibly go wrong? The Minister had fixed all the legacy issues and therefore, as was alluded to in her second statement, increased planting levels would automatically follow. The reality as always has been very disappointing to say the least.

The number of licences issued in 2023 to the end of October was 42 according to SEEFA and, as the chart illustrates, we are nowhere near 2022 levels (in itself a disastrous year for afforestation with just 2,000 hectares planted).

We can also see in the second chart that there were only 22 afforestation licenses issued in November 2023, with three in the last week of the month. At a historical average forest size of 7 hectares, this amounts to 154 ha. Official figures indicate that 1,440 hectares have been planted to date since January 2023, so unless there is a marked upsurge in planting in December 2023, we are probably heading for a sub-2,000 hectare outturn.





Issues with the new programme

One of the main issues with the new programme is the expansion of the number and type of environmental layers/habitats which require assessment. These have to be thoroughly assessed and have subsequent reports submitted by specialists at licence application time. These new requirements include certain bird habitats as designated by Birdwatch Ireland, which will now require ornithology reports for a significant number, if not all these sites. The bird species include Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank, Golden Plover, Dunlin and, surprisingly to many foresters, Snipe!

If these same sites have a watercourse present, then the existing requirement for an Ecological assessment/report still applies. In addition, High Nature Value Farmland layers have been added, which will rule out any conifer planting in certain zones. Six new water connected habitat layers have also been added to the existing water related layers, including River Waterbody, Lake Waterbody and Ground Waterbody Pressure zones as categorised by the Environmental Protection Agency.

There is also a new separate Irish Wet-

Sitka and Beech, Carlow.

Photo credit: Seán Lenihan

lands Layer, Indicative Peat Layer, Irish Semi-Natural Grassland layer and Pollution Potential Impact Layer – all with the capacity to rule out, restrict, amend and/or severely delay the final decision on whether the site can be afforested or not.

A quick count reveals that there are now 28 different environmental layers/habitats to be checked/assessed and reports submitted if required before an afforestation licence application will be accepted by the Department. This begs the obvious question which many foresters are now asking: where exactly can we plant trees in Ireland, especially commercial conifers?

Promotion of native/broadleaf schemes by Department

The "good news" is that we have a range of new schemes which the Department of Agriculture are clearly very excited about, judging by the active promotion of them in the media. Under the Native Tree Area Scheme, a landowner can plant a hectare, and possibly a second hectare if near a watercourse with native trees, without a licence.

We also have the new Forest Garden Scheme where up to a maximum of 1 hectare can be planted with fruit/nut bearing species on 40% of the site. In addition, while not strictly a forestry scheme, the Department is currently rolling out the ACRES tree planting scheme where landowners can plant 100-300 native trees on their farms or land.

It is hard to not conclude that the Department of Agriculture does not want commercial forestry on the scale that is required to maintain the current processing industry, and that is also required to supply homegrown timber for construction, pallets, fencing, wood pellets/firewood etc going forward.

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IS LABOUR A HIGH RISK IN FORESTRY?

Richard Hunter assesses new requirements for contractor labour and the additional responsibilities placed on forestry companies to comply.

To protect forest workers' rights, FSC International now requires harvesting contractors to have an outsourcer agreement with the organisation that has hired them. One of the outcomes is the requirement that contractors must ensure their workers are not being exploited.

Confor tried several times to counter this with interpretation requests to improve the wording for when an outsourcer agreement was required; we were unfortunately unsuccessful.

To start with, workers' rights in general across the UK need to be considered. We have had 18 months of strikes in the NHS, Post Office, train workers, teachers and general workers (Unison). Of course, this affects the industry indirectly via general disruption to the wider economy.

However, the International Trade Congress, which sets the risk factor that FSC International uses to assess a country, has rated the UK as a high risk to workers' rights, especially as the Government has brought in minimal service levels which will reduce or negate the impact of the strikes. The risk factor is not linked to forestry, but we are caught in the effects of the wider issues.

This means that harvesting contractors will now need to complete an annual self-assessment to show that the organisation conforms with the FSC core labour requirements. This will include such questions as 'To prevent child labour, how do you ensure the age of your workers?' and 'How do you ensure that wages are non-discriminatory?'. While for many organisations this is common practice, the new development is that they could be audited when the forest management company they are working for is being audited.

This adds additional cost, paperwork burden, and time to an audit when there is no real need. We know there is no need as UKWAS 4 section 5.6.1 has been protecting workers' rights for years, and in UKWAS 5 section 5.6.1 is further extended. Currently UKWAS 5 is undergoing review by FSC, and section 5.6.1 could potentially include a significant range of extra requirements to prove that the forest industry is:

- Not using child labour.
- Eliminating all forms of forced and compulsory labour.
- Ensuring that there is no discrimination in employment and occupation.
- Respecting freedom of association and the effective right to collective bargaining.

All these elements are tied up in UK law in some form but the pressure to include them is seen as a global issue as many countries do not have our high standard of legal protection, nor the means to enforce laws as we do. As the first requirement of UKWAS is to abide by the Law of the land, the argument is being made that specific requirements like these are not needed in the UK.

The inclusion of these requirements in UKWAS takes it from just a harvesting contractor problem to a problem for every forestry contractor from ground prep onwards: every contractor and their sub-contractors would be required to demonstrate compliance.

The requirement by FSC will be implemented over a transition period up till 31 December 2024. The full briefing note is called 'ADV-40-004-23 Evaluation of contractors against the FSC Core Labour Requirements' and can be found on the FSC UK website.

FSC UK are planning the following next steps:

- Training for auditors
- Update to FAQ on core labour requirements
- Refinement of risk-based approach towards implementation and auditing
- Webinar for stakeholders

The limited pool of highly skilled contractors is a constant topic of conversation and means that workers are often brought on by multiple management organisations. Therefore, a harvesting contractor working multiple sites for multiple organisations could be audited many times a year, as they will be caught up in the forest management unit audit. This is an element we are seeking to avoid, via several methods.

Confor has created a small working group to address the issue. We are in discussions with the Soil Association and FSC UK about how to minimize the impact on the sector. We are looking into several elements which include addressing the high-risk status we have been given.

The working group believes that the requirements requested by FSC international on UK certificate holders are out of proportion to the risk, economically and bureaucratically burdensome, and severely undermines the credibility of the FSC brand in the UK.

Gresham House fundraising for Forest Growth & Sustainability LP hits £300m target

Target achieved a year earlier than planned due to increasing interest in forestry.

Gresham House, the specialist alternative asset manager, has achieved the target total commitments of £300m for its Forest Growth & Sustainability LP following a final close. The fundraising has been achieved over two years against a three-year target reflecting growing recognition from institutional investors, family offices and private clients of the benefits of forestry as a sustainable natural capital investment.

Since its launch in June 2021, the strategy has attracted commitments from a range of institutional investors, including the Scottish National Investment Bank, the Pension Protection Fund, Worcestershire Pension Fund, East Riding Pension Fund, the National Trust, family offices and private investors.

This strong demand for forestry has been driven by a combination of factors, including long-term stable returns, its potential as a diversifier for portfolios, as well as its positive environmental impacts which can align with clients' net zero objectives. Sustainable forestry value and returns have minimal correlation to bonds and equities, but positive correlation to inflation. Returns are underpinned by the biological growth of the trees, which increase in volume and value annually, removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as they grow.

The Gresham House Forest Growth & Sustainability LP invests in a combination of new planting land for woodland creation and established sustainable commercial forestry across the UK. High-quality sustainable opportunities are targeted, generating returns from the sale of timber, the sequestration of carbon (and sale of carbon credits) and the capital growth of the underlying land and trees.

The capital raised in the final close will be deployed rapidly, with a focus on new productive woodland planting schemes as well as the acquisition of existing woodland for the production of sustainable commercial timber, building on the fund's existing portfolio of approximately 10,000 hectares spread across around 40 properties.

Gresham House is the UK's largest commercial forestry manager and manages c.160,000 hectares of forestry internationally worth over £3.5bn. It recently joined forces with nine other leading forestry companies to launch the International Sustainable Forestry Coalition, a new global initiative aimed at providing effective international leadership to support sustainable forest management as part of the climate transition.

Olly Hughes, Managing Director of Forestry at Gresham House, said: "This successful final close is a testament to the proven expertise of our forestry team and the long-term performance across a range of return drivers for the asset class. With growing recognition of the benefits forestry can bring to portfolios in terms of returns, diversification, inflation-protection and environmental impacts, the pipeline of opportunities is strong, and we will now be deploying this capital at pace into new planting projects around the UK."

Chair of the Worcestershire County Council Pension Fund Committee, Elizabeth Eyre, added: "Forestry has proven a valuable diversifier for our portfolio, while also delivering meaningful benefits in terms of reducing emissions. Gresham House is an established leader in forestry, and we are pleased to have increased our investment in this strategy, which we continue to believe offers compelling long-term returns and real-world environmental and social benefits."

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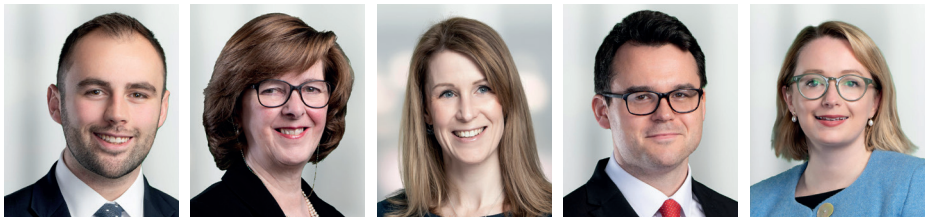
Frequently asked legal questions for the forestry sector

The team from Brodies LLP address some of the common queries they have received from Confor Members in 2023.



MEET THE TEAM: (LtoR) Simon Boendermaker; Isobel d'Inverno; Kate Donachie; Ramsay Hall and Caoimhe Hunter Blair

The challenges and opportunities of the forestry industry, coupled with the involvement of people, equipment, risk and regulations mean that those who work, manage and operate in the sector need to be familiar with the law. UK top 50 and leading Scottish law firm Brodies works with clients across the sector to provide advice on a variety of issues including health & safety, tax, regulation, property and employment and immigration.

For a number of years, the firm has worked with Confor to provide a legal helpline to its members. In this final edition of the year, legal experts from Brodies discuss some of the common questions they have been asked in relation to forestry. For more details on how Brodies can support you, get in touch via the helpline.

Q WHAT REGULATORY ISSUES SHOULD THE FORESTRY SECTOR BE AWARE OF?

Regulatory compliance should continue to be a key focus for the sector. For instance, the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 creates a new licensing regime with which those operating in the sector must comply.

In addition to the 2023 Act, there are two other key areas of risk. Managing the risk of falling trees is also particularly pertinent at this time of year in adverse weather, and the potential harm caused could be severe and potentially fatal. Organisations should have a clear procedure for the inspection of trees. For instance, individual tree inspection is necessary in circumstances where:

1. The tree is in a location frequently visited by the public or in an area that poses an obvious risk to adjacent infrastructure.
2. The tree has been identified as being in a condition that is likely to make it unstable.
3. And a decision has been made to retain the tree.

The Wildlife Management & Muirburn (Scotland) Bill will also impact the sector if it becomes law. The key potential implications include the proposed expansion of the powers of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA), prohibitions on the use of certain types of snares, and the introduction of a vicarious liability offence for the use of snares.

If a various liability offence was introduced, landowners and employers could be liable for the conduct of those under their control, such as employees and agents. In this context, the Bill would operate in a similar manner to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Q ARE WILDFIRES A PROBLEM IN SCOTLAND?

Given Scotland's climate we do not experience wildfires like those seen in Greece this summer. However, wildfires do occur here, and their impact can be catastrophic. Statistics published by Highland Council found that Scotland's firefighters responded to more than one wildfire a day in spring 2022.

The vast majority of wildfires in Scotland are caused by humans. In May 2023 a large wildfire in the Highlands, thought to have been started by wild campers, burned 1,500 hectares of land – the equivalent of 2,100 football pitches – and destroyed half of RSPB Corrimony.

In Scotland the public enjoys a right to access privately owned land and in recent years 'wild camping' has grown in popularity. This right of access does not alter the duties imposed on landowners and occupiers by the Occupiers' Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 and you are required to take reasonable care to prevent harm to visitors. This doesn't mean that you will be liable for whatever happens, but you do need to be mindful of wildfire risks.

You should assess whether there is a risk of wildfire on your land, including any risks arising from wild campers starting fires. If wild camping is an issue, it might be worth introducing fire pits or designated sites for fires. It might also be sensible to place signage and communicate the risks and responsible behaviour on social media and community channels.

Regardless of how wildfires arise, if there is a risk of them on your land, you should have a fire management plan. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service can assist you with this.

Q IF AN OPERATOR WANTS TO INSTALL A TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAST IN MY FOREST, WHAT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO ME?

Given their location and topography, forest sites are often attractive for operators, however some landowners are reluctant to agree to enter into agreements with operators under the Electronic Communications Code (the Code).

In terms of the Code, landowners have limited grounds of objection and usually either agree a voluntary agreement with the operator or, if agreement cannot be reached, having a Code agreement imposed on them. Operators do, however, still need to follow local planning processes in relation to proposed mast developments.

If the landowner engages with the process, operators are usually willing to offer additional incentive payments, reflecting how promptly terms are agreed and agreements are signed. Engagement in the process also allows for input by the landowner and their professional advisers to protect the landowner's interests and balance the operator's rights with ongoing forestry operations.

If the landowner does not engage with the voluntary process, the operator is entitled to seek the imposition of Code rights in terms of paragraph 20 of the Code, or paragraph 26 of the Code for "interim rights". An imposed agreement often reflects the operator's standard terms and is unlikely to offer any incentive payments. Additionally, the court has much more lim-

ited grounds to determine consideration for the lease or compensation to the landowner, and any payments awarded may not even cover the landowner's costs in finalising the imposed agreement.

For those reasons, you should always engage with professional advisers immediately following an approach from an operator.

Q WHAT IS THE TAX AND VAT TREATMENT OF WOODLAND WHERE CARBON CAPTURE IS INVOLVED?

The introduction of the Woodland Carbon Code in 2011 has meant that there is a structured approach in the UK to the sequestration of carbon in woodlands, leading to the issue of Woodland Carbon Units which can be used by companies to report against UK-based emissions or in relation to reporting carbon neutrality or net zero emissions. Many landowners and forestry managers are becoming increasingly involved in carbon capture and other environmental initiatives. The tax treatment of these activities though is far from clear.

The operation of commercial woodlands in the UK enjoys a favourable tax treatment, with no tax payable on income from the sale of timber or the occupation of commercial woodlands, no capital gains tax payable on the sale of trees, and 100% Inheritance Tax Business Property Relief available on commercial woodlands.

Q ARE WOODLANDS USED FOR CARBON CAPTURE TAXED IN THE SAME WAY?

There are many unanswered questions not only about the tax and VAT implications of carbon capture using woodlands but also the reclamation of peatland and other land management activities involving biodiversity units and nutrient migration.

The UK Government held a consultation on the "taxation of environmental land management and ecosystem service markets" between March and June 2023. Regrettably no announcements in response to the consultation were made at the Autumn Statement 2023, with the UK Government confirming that responses to the consultation were still under consideration. It is hoped that legislative changes will be introduced in the 2024 Budget to bring clarity to this complex area.

CONFOR MEMBERS

FREE LEGAL CONSULTATION

Confor Members have access to a free legal helpline, administered by Brodies LLP. Get in touch for guidance on key issues that impact forest owners and the forestry sector.

Whether your query is employment law, health & safety, planning, tax or property-related, one of our experts will be happy to give you a free initial consultation. More info: https://bit.ly/3yPGRI1

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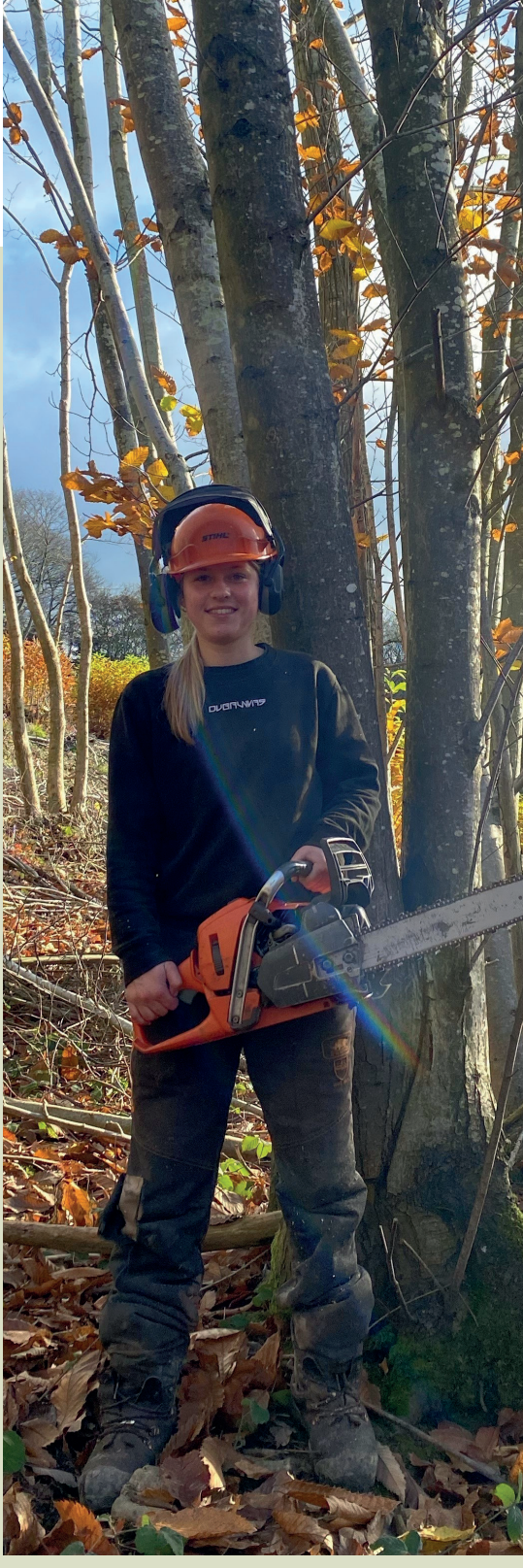
A BURNING CURIOSITY

Sarah Wild shares her journey to earn a qualification in Wildfire Management, supported by the Forest Industries Education and Provident Fund (FIEPF).



I am an early career professional, currently studying the MSc in Forestry at Bangor University. During my studies I have become very interested in wildfire management, as wildfire is an emerging issue in the UK. With summers predicted to be hotter and drier in the coming decades, the risk of wildfire in the UK is increasing - managing for it is a practical way of increasing the resilience of forests to extreme weather events, heatwaves and drought.

Therefore, I decided to widen my skillset by completing the Forestry Commission's Lantra-accredited Wildfire and Prescribed Fire course.

I received funding from the ICF to do the first two modules (Vegetation Fire Foundation is the pre-requisite for the other modules and is completed online; Wildfire Management Plan consisted of an online component and a one-day workshop, which took place at Alice Holt Forest). These provided me with the knowledge and skills to design, implement and review a Wildfire Management Plan to sit within a wider Forest Management Plan.

The FIEPF awarded me a grant as part of its remit to improve professional development by supporting further training to do the remaining two modules.

Vegetation Fire Operator provided operational knowledge of prescribed burning via an online component, and skills via a one-day workshop using practical training exercises. The module covers topics such as hazards and risks, communication and organisational structure during a prescribed fire, and the correct use and maintenance of hand tools, pumps, hose, ignition devices and ancillary equipment.

I was assessed on correctly fuelling, using and de-fuelling a drip torch, and with the other participants, I practiced putting out a fire using a flap head fire beater. The effect of topography on fire behaviour was demonstrated and I practiced different prescribed fire burning patterns such as a backing fire and a flanking fire. Practicing these skills was very rewarding and overall, it was a highly enjoyable day.

The Prescribed Fire Manager module also consisted of an online component

Calling all Philatelists

After a silent auction for a selection of 1973 National Tree Planting Year first day covers at the Confor Woodland Show, three covers now have new homes. Kindly donated by Tim Kirk, three covers are still in search of owners and are open to offers. Email fiona@confor.org.uk if interested.

Say it With Wood trains new staff member

The Education Fund was approached by Toby Allen of Say it With Wood for support in funding a staff member, Amelia Stezaker, to go on a chainsaw maintenance, cross cutting, and small trees felling course as the first stage in her cutting career.

She said: "As a result of the funding I was able to take and pass the chainsaw maintenance and cross cutting, and small trees felling courses.

"This has allowed me to progress in the woods and at the yard. I've been able to fell small trees and cut Rhododendron in the woods. In the yard I've been cutting firewood for customers.

"Overall, my techniques and confidence have improved massively since passing the courses. I'd like to say a big thank-you for giving me this opportunity to grow my career in forestry."

Tony added: "The contribution towards Amelia's training has really made a difference to our business. It meant we could take the time to train someone, who we felt had potential, but with no previous experience in forestry or manual trades.

"Since completing the chainsaw course, the minimum requirement for working in the woods, Amelia has been building up her competence, using the saw most days. This includes felling small trees ahead of the harvester and tidying up stumps afterwards, Rhododendron bashing, cutting chestnut coppice, firewood production and breaking down crowns of large trees as part of her training towards the next step of medium trees.

"We have also been bringing her on the machines gradually, and she now takes responsibility for basic maintenance and operating the firewood processor and David Brown tractor that runs it. At the time of writing, Amelia is on a hazel coppice course to learn about producing the smaller products we often don't have time to deal with."

About the fund

We are seeing a growing interest in the Forest Industries Education and Provident Fund as shown by the three reports from previous recipients in this issue of FTN.

The Fund supports career development for Confor members. Applicants can be individuals or companies, they must present clear reasons for doing the course, show how it will further their careers, and provide some background information.

Applicants can be at any stage in their careers and can pursue a wide range of training including attendance at conferences, participation on specialist courses (e.g, ecology, tree health, timber technologies, GIS) or management skills or practical training (e.g. chainsaw, drones, mechanical).

Trustees are also interested in requests to co-fund with other bodies as this may broaden the scope of training opportunities available.

Awards can only be offered prior to training. It generally takes about three weeks to process an application, with offers of up to £1,000 per application.

For more details and an application form, visit the Confor website.

and one-day workshop, and provided the knowledge and skills to design, implement and review a Prescribed Fire Operations Plan. Like the Wildfire Management Plan workshop, I was given a scenario and a standardised template, which I filled in with my objectives and how I wanted to achieve them. A lot of writing was involved, but there was a lot of support from the trainers and the other participants (including plenty of tea and biscuits!), and we were all able to finish our plans by the end of the day.

The workshops for the these latter modules took place in the New Forest and were run by two highly experienced fire fighters and trainers: Andy Elliott has

over 40 years' experience in the Fire and Rescue Service, is a National Wildfire Tactical Advisor, and Senior Research Fellow in Wildfire at the University of Exeter; Dean Hodges has 26 years' experience in the FRS and was also a National Wildfire Tactical Advisor.

The other participants came from a variety of backgrounds, both private and public sector, and included experienced prescribed burners and forest managers, as well as those new to forestry like myself.

I am very grateful for the funding to do these modules and I would also like to thank Rob Gazzard at the Forestry Commission for running the Wildfire and Prescribed Fire course. To find out more, please contact elizabeth.pincher@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

THE PLANTED FOREST, THE MAN-MADE FOREST

Simon Place, High Grains Forestry, attended the 5th International Congress on Planted Forests in Nairobi, Kenya, at the beginning of November. He shares his experience.

One speaker remarked that as this was only the fifth congress on such an important subject, perhaps they had started a little late. The congress was assembled by multiple organisations, including the European Institute of Planted Forests, European Institute of Forests, IUFRO, Kenya Forest Research Institute, Kenya Forest Service and CIFOR, the latter of which also hosted the event in the magnificent complex at the World Agroforestry Centre in Karura Forest outside Nairobi. The event was held both inside and outside, with the middle day spent on site looking at various region-specific aspects of forestry and agroforestry.

The presentation topics were related, in the main, to aspects surrounding planted forests as opposed to the natural woodlands and focused on the commercial benefits and practices.

Principal secretary's speech

The Principal Secretary of the State Department of Forestry, Mr Gitonga Mugambi, said in his opening speech that private investment has a major role to play in the economic growth in forestry in Kenya and Africa in general.

The yield from Kenyan forests is currently half the volume required for the country, and the forest resource is undervalued. Value chain losses are too high, and they need to embrace FSC/PEFC and CoC to protect what they have and demonstrate responsible management. The use of timber in construction was identified as a major step to help the timber sector and improve sustainability.

The Kenyan story

Forestry in Kenya began to emerge in the 1880s, working existing woodlands to supply timber and firewood as the population began to grow. Over the following years, Eucalyptus spp, Pinus radiata and Cupressus macrocarpa were introduced in early plantations. However, due to disease, the latter two were replaced with Cupressus lusitanica and Pinus patula, both of which grow best in the damper more fertile soils at higher altitudes.

Kenya has approximately 8% forest cover, which is well below the average, but the government aims to reach 30% forest cover by 2030, with a strong commercial timber focus. To recognise the need for trees and raise awareness, the government declared 13 November a public holiday to plant trees.

Kenya has three main commercial tree species: Pinus patula (Mexican Weeping Pine), Eucalyptus grandis (Rose Gum) and Cypress lusitanica (Mexican Cedar). Population growth in the country is leading the demand for more timber. Wood is the main source of fuel, as four out of five people rely on it for energy. As a result, pressure is mounting on both the natural woodlands and the commercial areas, particularly for sawn timber.

The development of the transmission pole and tea-curing businesses all put a strain on the limited resources. Additional public/private commercial investment in suitable forest systems will take the pressure off the remaining natural wooded areas.

The role of bamboo

Bamboo is really the wonder wood! Uses for the 'timber' are many-fold, particularly for charcoal making. With 75%–80% of energy in Kenya coming from wood products, bamboo charcoal is a successful way to take pressure off forests and create employment

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for small-scale producers in rural communities making high-density briquettes. So far, bamboo charcoal is used not only in rural homes but also in schools, hotels and businesses.

Bringing bamboo into the equation will help to dramatically reduce the current circa 1% forest deforestation per year in Kenya. For this to be achieved, the government needs to offer incentives and support for the operating capital costs along with marketing and training. There is currently a national tree-harvesting ban in place, due to be reviewed in 2024.

Green investment in Africa

Kenya and East Africa have enormous potential for green investment for forestry projects. The climate is suited for commercial tree species, and the need for trees and timber is very high. However, investment has been low due to poor returns over the last 30 years.

Except for Uganda, most projects have failed to deliver to the investor, and Africa has a high risk associated with forestry. High-risk investments are not uncommon, but the returns of 7%–8% make it high risk and relatively low return. It is clear mistakes were made in the past, and there are important lessons for future investors and companies to consider.

"KENYA AND EAST AFRICA HAVE ENORMOUS POTENTIAL FOR GREEN INVESTMENT FOR FORESTRY PROJECTS."

Currently, only 11% of the investment appertains to non-forest, which for Africa is too low. Communities are key to the success of a project in many cases, and successful schemes have seen infrastructure developments as part of the planning. Such schemes have worked well in Uruguay, and there are billions of dollars waiting to invest in Africa if the schemes are viable and healthy.

To increase willingness to invest in African forestry projects, there is a strong need to secure the land with respect for the local communities, take effective measures to tackle corruption and assay possible conflict resolution.

Presentations

There were various interesting abstracts that grabbed attention – from Latvia on the carbon benefits of drainage operations; the DR Congo on push for more eucalyptus plantations; planting of bamboo and biomass in Mauritius; naturalisation of Eucalyptus globus in Ethiopia.

Uganda has initiated a detailed programme to survey the remnant forest areas and gauge the effectiveness of the recovery works; and Saudi Arabia has launched the Saudi Green Initiative, which aims to see 10 billion trees planted and 10 million ha of degraded land restored by 2030 through public–private partnerships.

The Site Visit to Kinale and Kenya Forest Research Institute (KEFRI)

The KEFRI visit included hearing about their research into breeding Melia trees by tissue culture to meet the demand for the species in the arid areas of the country and seeing their enormous and somewhat disturbing collection of insects from over the last 60 years.

After being welcomed by a local dance at the Forest Station by one of the communities, we saw a recently felled Cypress stand ready for restocking this season. The land, now bare of all but the stumps, is managed by the local community, and they are able to grow food crops by agreement with the Kenya Forest Service, which include sweet potato, beans and peas but not common maize, as it is too competitive for the trees. It was an extraordinary sight to see, and the same community will plant the trees and look after them for three years. Agroforestry in action!

Further along the road, we walked through a young crop of Cypress in a silvopasture arrangement with sheep and cattle. This system had resulted in an alarming level of stem damage, which in some cases had killed the tree. I surmise that a few dead

trees are worth it for the community relationships and symbiotic arrangements for management.

The final stop was a local sawmill with a mobile Wood-Mizer in action. This tool has transformed the output of the sawmill and can produce quality rails and cut timber for the construction and farming markets. The investment for such machines is a big issue, and the community hopes the harvesting ban will be lifted by Christmas, at least in the Public Estate.

It was not clear where the timber in the yard came from, but the details of the current country-wide logging ban may only relate to natural forest areas, the public estate or certain species with exceptions being granted.

Lessons for the UK

The congress centred on Africa first then the rest of the world, but as usual in the forestry environment, so much can be interlinked back to the UK and other countries. The forestry presentations covered a wide range of topics including the need to plant more trees, the benefits of agroforestry and silvoforestry systems, identifying pests and diseases, as well as the general need for additional timber for construction.

Concerns about the changing weather patterns are a worry for all and knowing that other countries are working on massive tree planting schemes drives the efforts in the UK.

Creating new woodlands in any country requires consultation and discussion. The lessons from hearing how this is done in East Africa show the importance of getting this right for a successful outcome and reinforces the need for vigorous discussion. In the UK, we often feel over-burdened by the consultation we have to do to progress planting schemes, but the steps other countries have to negotiate can be significantly more complex once farming community groups are considered.

An aspect of forest creation that we enjoy but is missing in East Africa is meaningful incentives. Financial incentives in Europe help to make a land use choice, but land is difficult to obtain for woodland creation. In Kenya, there's an abundance of land (with careful negotiation and considerations) but little local support, which relies on foreign private investment.

At present, our focus is on the woodland and associated direct costs, such as ground prep, fencing, roading and the trees. In Kenya, the key to success is creating infrastructure for the communities that live around the woodland and making the project benefit them. This drains income from the woodland and currently can make the investment marginal.

A big thank you to Confor and the FIEPF for assisting with the costs associated with attending this fascinating congress, as without this support, it would not have been possible to attend.

No breeding population of beetle found in wider environment

Surveys in the woodlands surrounding the port of Grangemouth have revealed no evidence of a wider breeding population of Ips typographus.

The findings come after a thorough series of aerial and ground surveys carried out by Scottish Forestry's tree health team and expert entomologists from Forest Research. Spruce tree canopy surveys will continue throughout the winter season.

The Ips typographus beetle is normally found in mainland Europe and has had a damaging effect on spruce trees across the continent.

Breeding populations of the beetle have also been found in Kent, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex where they are subject to eradication measures.

Scottish Forestry first announced that an Ips typographus beetle had been found in a trap in woodland close to Grangemouth in September of this year. A second finding in a nearby trap is assessed as being part of the same incident.

James Nott, Head of Tree Health at Scottish Forestry said: "I am pleased that after comprehensive aerial and ground surveys there have been no findings of these beetles in the wider environment in Scotland. Early indications are that this is an isolated incident involving beetles that have hitchhiked possibly on cargo arriving at the port of Grangemouth.

"Our surveillance network and traps using pheromone lures, developed by Forest Research, have proved very successful. Trapping will continue at this location and throughout Scotland as part of our ongoing surveillance against pests and diseases.

"I would like to thank all those involved in carrying out the surveys and analysing the findings for all their hard work."

An intensive survey of all spruce trees, including windthrow, was carried out in a one-kilometre radius of the beetle findings - no detections of Ips typographus were made.

Investigations and modelling using the Met Office dispersion model Numerical Atmospheric-dispersion Modelling Environment (NAME) by the University of Cambridge and Forest Research have shown that it is highly unlikely that the beetles could have been blown from continental Europe or southern England. It would be more likely that the beetles arrived via cargo from the nearby port and were drawn to the traps by the pheromone lures.

Traps are located throughout Scotland as part of the on-going UK tree health surveillance national programme, which includes traps in ports and processors, as well as extensive trapping in woodlands. These traps are active during the warmer months when the beetle is more likely to fly but on-the-ground surveillance takes place year-round.

Photo credit: Max Blake Forest Research

Max Blake, Forest Research Head of Entomology, added: "Forest Research has extensive expertise in surveying and eradicating Ips typographus in Southern England. We've supported Scottish Forestry in this surveying work and will continue to do so going forward."

As a regulated quarantine pest, any breeding populations of Ips typographus found in Scotland will be subject to strict eradication measures to prevent the beetles becoming established and damaging trees.

Several locations in southeast England are subject to such measures and Scottish Forestry is working closely with Forestry Commission colleagues to ensure preparedness for any future findings in Scotland.

Anyone who wishes to report any suspect findings or tree health problems are advised to do so through the TreeAlert portal.

The hidden economic and environmental cost of rewilding

Professor Andrew Cameron of the Institute of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Aberdeen, details his view on rewilding in contrast to productive forestry.

Productive forests are effective carbon sinks, produce timber on a sustainable basis, and provide a wide range of social, environmental, and economic benefits. However, there has been growing hostility towards productive forestry from environmental organisations increasingly influenced by the paradigms of 're-wilding' and 'nativeness' with the prospect of limited if any timber production.

They argue that the long-term benefits to society of forests dominated by native trees (e.g. birch, hazel, oak, alder) outweigh the future benefits of commercially productive species (e.g. spruce, firs). Discussions within the media on expanding environmental forests never consider the 50 million tonnes of wood products that we use in Britain each year and where it comes from.

With only 13% of land occupied by trees (19% in Scotland), Britain has the second smallest area of forest in Europe and is one of the world's biggest importers of wood products. Use of wood products has increased by almost 25% over the last decade and this has seen an equivalent rise in imports.

Ironically, the growing demand for timber is influenced by environmental pressures to replace polluting or non-renewable materials with 'environmentally sustainable' wood products (use of cardboard packaging has increased exponentially in recent years), and arguments around carbon and 'embedded energy' are increasingly used to support the greater use of wood in construction. Sawn timber for construction uses less energy in its production and has higher insulation properties than building materials such as cement, steel, and brick.

A reduction in carbon emissions by substituting timber for masonry and concrete in building construction is around 20% and 60% respectively. Scotland is well ahead of the rest of Britain in timber frame construction with over 80% of new houses built using this method.

Most of the wood imported to Britain currently comes from Northern and Central Europe; however, many European countries are reducing production due to climate induced damage raising concerns over the source of future imports. With worldwide demand for timber increasing at around 4% per annum, global wood supply/demand balances are anticipated to change from surplus to deficit by the middle of this century. That will inevitably precipitate an expansion of logging (often illegal) in natural/semi-natural forests.

A limiting supply of timber will also see global timber prices increase and we could quickly find ourselves dependent on the vagaries of world markets, a salutary reminder of the impact of the global oil crises around 50 years ago.

Growing more of our own timber would not only reduce the need for importing wood products but would indirectly facilitate the reduction in damage and loss of the world's natural forests (a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions) through timber extraction offsetting (i.e. increasing timber output from productive forests to replace/offset production from natural forests).

Productive managed forests use land efficiently. They only cover 3% of the world's forest area yet produce one third of global industrial timber. In addition, productive forests support up to two and a half times more greenhouse gas mitigation potential than planted broadleaf conservation forests, and it is vital to remember the significant amount of carbon locked up in harvested wood. At harvesting, soil carbon stocks and most of the nutrients in productive forests are replenished from the woody material retained on site.

We are moving towards a scenario where we increasingly use our land for non-productive conservation tree planting while 'offshoring' our timber supplies, itself creating a significant 'carbon footprint' through shipping. Growing more of our own timber would improve domestic balance of payments (imports of wood products to the UK cost £11 billion in 2022), reduce pressure on the world's remaining natural forests, create efficient carbon sinks, and establish a sustainable resource that generates wealth and employment, particularly in economically fragile rural areas.

Despite having had a policy for more than 100 years to decrease the country's dependence on imported wood by increasing

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Unique opportunities for nature-based career growth

Tilhill is seeking graduates with drive, passion and enthusiasm to take up an incredible chance to actively grow their career within the forestry sector whilst contributing to the fight against climate change.

Tilhill is part of the BSW Group, the largest integrated forestry business in the UK, and a member of binderholz, Europe's leading timber processing operation. These linkages bring with them unique opportunities for graduates to experience all aspects of the forest industry, from work experience in their commercial nurs-

ery and the UK's most advanced sawmills, to a comprehensive programme of learning and hands-on experience in woodland creation, forest management, and timber harvesting.

Enthusiastic graduates, or those about to graduate in forestry or related subjects such as land management or environmental studies, will be ideally placed to join Tilhill's three-year graduate programme.

Successful applicants are assigned to an office or business stream where they learn every aspect of that area, including shadowing highly experienced colleagues. With opportunities across the UK, graduate trainees are offered mentoring and pairing with an experienced manager during their training period.

Harry Stevens, Tilhill's Managing Director and Forestry Director of the BSW Forestry Group, said: "It is a most exciting time to join the forest industry, with woodland creation playing an increasingly important role in combatting climate change. Tilhill's years of experience in planting trees, and planning and creating woodlands and forests, coupled with our woodland carbon related business stream, CarbonStore, make Tilhill a cutting-edge company.

"Every aspect of our work provides nature-based solutions. As an employee within the BSW Group, graduates are uniquely offered a broad range of opportunities to engage with the Group's extensive range of forestry, landscaping and timber related businesses.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for graduates with drive, enthusiasm and passion for all aspects of forestry and working outdoors to be part of growing all our futures.

"Tilhill offers all its employees a friendly and challenging work environment with great personal and career development opportunities. The company operates an industry-renowned management development programme that starts by building up management skill sets in order to provide graduates with all the tools they need to be successful, professional managers of the future."

To take advantage of this unique opportunity and apply, please visit Tilhill's graduate careers page and apply online. The deadline to apply is 28 February with placements during 2024.

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the forest area, in practice the area of forest in Scotland has only increased by about 15% in that time. For the last 40 years much of that increase has been non-commercially productive native woodland.

Scotland's Forestry Strategy provides for increasing the forest area by 200,000 hectares by 2032. However, in 2022, 40% (4,100 hectares) of the 10,500 hectares of bare land planted in Scotland, were planted with native broadleaved tree species that will produce little if any usable timber... and it doesn't stop there! Scotland's long-established productive coniferous forests are impacted by the rewilding paradigm.

Of the 8,300 hectares of productive conifers that were felled in 2022, one fifth of the area was replanted with predominantly unproductive broadleaved tree species, further reducing our ability to produce the timber that we need in the future. It is also interesting to reflect on the illogicality of conservationists in criticising non-native tree species growing in Scottish forests that cover less than one fifth of the land area when almost the entire agricultural sector covering around 70% of the land area is based on farming non-native plants and animals.

The current funding model for native tree planting urgently needs to be reviewed. The combination of generous planting grants for native broadleafs (27% higher than productive spruce) and the sale of 'carbon credits' (representing 1 tonne CO2 equivalent sequestered in tree planting) is attracting speculators who are buying large tracts of land, 'rewild' with native broadleafs supported by generous taxpayer-funded grants, then sell the planted areas to private investors/companies seeking carbon offsets.

The current arrangement of grants and carbon funding is seriously disadvantageous to timber production and, consequently, the link to tackling climate change and achieving net zero by 2045 has been broken. In effect, carbon funding slow-growing broadleafs is being incentivised at the expense of significantly greater carbon sinks in productive conifers.

On average, every hectare of land that could support productive conifers but instead planted with native broadleaved species represents a future loss to the economy of some 440 tonnes (20 lorry-loads) of usable wood. Every tonne of wood that is imported represents a drain on our economy, a risk to biodiversity somewhere else in the world, and adds more carbon to the atmosphere.

This is not a reason to stop the restoration and expansion of endangered native forests in Scotland - that must remain a priority. However, it needs to be recognised that dealing with the imminent environmental crisis associated with climate change and a future world shortage of industrial timber will require new thinking regarding afforestation and productive tree planting.

Highland electric timber truck hits the road in drive to Net Zero

A new electric timber truck, believed to be the first of its kind in the UK, is now in operation in the Highlands as part of a forestry trial to help decarbonise the sector.

Scotlog Sales Ltd of Inverness has taken delivery of the new 44 tonne wagon, which will transport timber shipped in from the west coast to be hauled from the Port of Inverness to the West Fraser site at Dalcross.

The new "wagon and drag" truck – a rigid vehicle and trailer – is part of a three-year trial testing two state-of-the-art electric vehicles to move timber, cutting down on emissions.

The Volvo truck is the first of their line to be produced in Europe and is fitted with a specialist Metsatek timber body and Ecco bolsters. It has been in operation for six weeks, firstly working at the Port of Inverness before taking to the roads and becoming a familiar sight on the A96.

Scottish Forestry is investing £452,000 towards the trial which is partnering with Scotlog Sales Ltd, James Jones & Sons, the Volvo Group and Cleaner EV.

A second electric lorry (artic unit) has been in operation in the south of Scotland with forestry business James Jones & Sons.

Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon said: "Around 7 million tonnes of wood are harvested from Scotland's forests each year and transported to sawmills, board manufacturers and other processors, mostly on 44 tonne diesel lorries.

"The forestry sector is keen to use modern technology to tackle timber transport issues as part of its overall efforts to decarbonise and reach Net Zero.

"I'm pleased that this second truck is now working in the Highlands and look forward to hearing more about this innovative trial and how it can help cut transport emissions."

A key element of the three-year trial is that all the partners involved are committed to sharing their experiences of running the electric lorries with others in the timber and rural haulage sectors. This information will be updated on a web portal that is currently under development.

Creel Maritime Ltd consultants are monitoring the use of the lorries and arranging knowledge exchange opportunities over the course of the following three years.

Neil Stoddart, Director of Creel Maritime Ltd, is managing the project with his team and added: "In terms of road haulage, the timber industry is pretty advanced in looking for solutions to decarbonise. For example, we are reducing diesel lorry miles on many projects and opting for transport by sea.

"This is a very exciting project but there are big challenges in running HGV lorries on electric power, mainly on cost grounds and infrastructure. This three-year trial will look into all these aspects and I'm keen to share as much detail on this with the industry. So far both trucks are matching expectations both in terms of commercial performance and driver operation."

Timber transport is an integral part of the forestry sector chain and reducing its emissions through technology and different modes of transport is a positive move. The timber supply chain relies on many parts of the forestry sector and creating new woodlands is part and parcel of this effort, ensuring timber is available well into the future.

Grants for domestic tree production re-open

Professional foresters, landowners, nurseries and seed suppliers are being encouraged to come forward for the latest round of Seed Sourcing and Tree Production Capital Grants.

The Tree Production Capital Grant supports efforts to build nursery capacity and grow trees and seeds supply chains for the long-term. Funding will increase domestic production of trees and seeds, supporting investments in expansion, automation and mechanisation of facilities and equipment.

The support has been designed to complement the Tree Production Innovation Fund, which provides support for research projects that enhance tree production methods in England.

The Seed Sourcing Grant helps boost domestic tree seed production and support green jobs, helping meet the increased demand for trees and achieve our ambitious tree planting targets. Due to shortages of seed globally, it is vital that we improve not only the quantity but also the quality, diversity, and biosecurity of our seed supply.

Forestry Commission Chief Executive Richard Stanford said: "These important grants have played a valuable role in helping boost domestic trees and seed production and develop employment opportunities in the sector.

Eligible activities for the Seed Sourcing Grant include:

- Management of existing Seed Stands, to ensure they are productive for seed collectors;
- Desk studies and field studies to identify and bring additional Seed Stands onto the National Register of Basic Material;
- Planning and planting of new Seed Stands;
- Planning and planting of new Seed Orchards.

Eligible projects for the Tree Production Capital Grant include:

- Intelligent transplanting systems;
- Polytunnel infrastructure and equipment;
- Seed processing and storage equipment;
- Biosecurity investments such as water treatment and refrigeration equipment.

"I encourage all eligible applicants to come forward so we can continue to build capacity in the sector, to support increased tree cover and make our treescapes more resilient."

AJ Paul, Director of Cutlers Wood Ltd in Ipswich, applied for Tree Production Capital Funding in 2022. Over the last year, with support from the grant, the nursery purchased several pieces of equipment to increase productivity significantly whilst also improving the quality of the trees grown and ultimately their success rate.

He attested: "Like many other agricultural businesses, we were looking to diversify. However, the capital outlay required to reach a commercial scale of tree production would not have been possible without the support of the Tree Production Capital Grant.

"The initial funding will help the nursery reach a positive cashflow earlier and so allow further investment to improve quality and quantity of production".

Clive Ellis, Land Manager of Oxley Wood, added: "I'd already been thinking about how important lime was in terms of a national resource. When the Seed Sourc-

Rainbow Terra wins 'Sustainable Product of the Year' at Pro Landscaper awards

Wood-based eco tree shelter from Rainbow Professional scoops prestigious award

On Wednesday 21 November, Rainbow Professional attended the 2023 Pro Landscaper Sustainability & Biodiversity Awards, where they were delighted and proud to win the 'Sustainable Product of the Year award.

The Pro Landscaper Sustainability & Biodiversity Awards, held in association with Kress, recognise the environmental benefits that companies and projects in the sector provide. The awards are on a mission to showcase the most important innovations and initiatives across the UK landscaping sector, from design and construction to product supply and manufacturing.

Judges of the 'Sustainable Product of the Year' were looking for products that give back to the natural environment and are designed for a long lifespan, in an aesthetically pleasing way.

Pierre Talpe, Director at Rainbow Professional, commented: "We are so happy to receive this recognition for our work developing the Rainbow Terra over the last four years. Our industry needs to move towards

ing Grant funding became available, I decided to apply to help bring more British home-grown seed to the market, as well as improve the ecological vision of Oxley Wood.

"I encourage all eligible applicants to come forward so we can continue to build capacity in the sector, to support increased tree cover and make our treescapes more resilient."

Clive, a woodland manager working with ancient woodlands across Essex and Suffolk, successfully applied for the Seed Sourcing Grant in 2022 and secured funding to help improve lime-dense woodland in Oxley Wood, Essex.

The third round of the Tree Production Capital Grant is now open until 30 January 2024 and will provide up to £2.5 million of funding during 2024/25, subject to successful bids.

The Seed Sourcing Grant aims to attract a broad range of applicants, including both organisations already involved in these activities and those who have not previously considered seed production. It is now open until 13 February 2024 and will provide up to £260,000 of funding during 2024/25, subject to successful bids.

UK cell-grown tree producer Alba Trees acquired by Cibus

Cibus Fund II, the specialist sustainable food and agriculture fund, has successfully completed the acquisition of Alba Trees, a UK market leader in the production and supply of cell-grown plants for sustainable forestry, native woodland and hedgerows.

Cibus and Alba will expand existing production while focusing on best-in-class agronomy and precision technology to prioritise plant health, product quality and resource efficiency. A core focus for Cibus is environmental sustainability and ensuring it is addressed at every level of the supply chain. This aim is shared with Alba and will be at the centre of the company's future growth plans, aligning with the UK Government's ambitions to plant nearly a million hectares of new woodland 2050.

Rob Appleby, Founder and CIO at Cibus Capital LLP, investment adviser to the Cibus funds, said: "Our partnership with Alba Trees brings an exciting addition to the Cibus portfolio. Cibus invests in companies which prioritise decarbonisation, promote sustainable forestry, woodland creation and biodiversity. Alba Trees is an industry leader in this sector, providing farmers and landowners with the tools to achieve superior commercial returns and climate resilience."

Craig Turner, CEO of Alba Trees, added: "Our new partnership with Cibus marks an exciting step in our growth journey. The firm's expertise and strong experience investing in agriculture and agtech will enable us to scale our business, embrace technology and to continue to invest in plant health."

tree shelters that are certified to be biodegradable in the right environments and can be left behind with a clean conscience."

Earlier this year, Green-tech received the first delivery of the new Rainbow Professional Terra tree shelter. The product is manufactured from UK-sourced wood that biodegrades naturally in soil. Green-tech is the largest supplier of Rainbow tree protection products in the UK and was the first to place an order while the product was still in development.

Green-tech's Marketing Director Kate Humes commented: "We have worked with Rainbow Professional for many years and have collaborated closely with them whilst they developed the new Terra tree shelter.

"It's the only independently certified soil biodegradable tree shelter that is 100% plant-based and non-toxic that biodegrades into healthy nutrients. It's a tremendous product and a lot of years of R&D has gone into producing it so I am thrilled for Alex, Pierre, and the Rainbow team.

"As more and more of our customers seek plastic-free tree protection alternatives I am delighted that we have added the award-winning Rainbow Terra to our rural tree planting portfolio. Green-tech is all about offering customers choice and this has proved a very popular product. Well done and good luck to the Rainbow team."

Judges' comments included "great product and far better than the conventional solution", "good product which is underpinned by external certification regarding soil biodegradation", and "a much-needed product, I look forward to seeing how it develops."

Jim Kirkwood, Director of Product Management at Kress, said: "We are proud to be the sponsor of the Pro Landscaper Sustainability & Biodiversity Awards.

"Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do at Kress, so it is important to us to recognise the contributions of industry towards this vital goal and to celebrate these important achievements towards a better, greener future for all."

Welsh woodland demonstrates how trees can be a viable option for farmers

A site in Conwy is showing farmers considering diversifying into tree planting the potential economic and environmental benefits.

Trees shape the appearance of the Welsh countryside, but their role extends far beyond the visual. From mitigating the effects of drought and reducing soil erosion to capturing carbon and providing shelter for livestock, woodland can introduce resilience to farm businesses.

David Brown and Ruth Pybus are demonstrating that planting and managing woodland doesn't have to be complicated at Bron Haul, near Abergele, Conwy.

In the 1990s, 40 of the 70 acres at Bron Haul were planted with mostly site-native broadleaf woodland, and in 2014 David and Ruth planted a further 10 acres. The couple recently hosted a Farming Connect event where they shared their knowledge and experience with others who are considering integrating woodland into their own farming systems.

The woodland was planted with the main objectives of producing quality hardwood timber, improving biodiversity, aiding water management, carbon capture and storage, and building resilience into soils.

Attendees at the Farming Connect event were advised to have a "really positive vision" of what they wanted their woodland to achieve.

Daid said: "Farmers are under a lot of pressure to plant woodland but we need to have a clear vision about what we want it to provide.

"Cherry, sweet chestnut and ash that we planted in 1997 are already at that stage where they are producing planking timber and fencing posts."

There is potential for trees to generate valuable income from timber but farmers are often put off from pursuing this diversification because they perceive that trees take a long time to grow. Timber at Bron Haul has been used for making sweet chestnut stiles, wild cherry doors, planed ash, and cherry flooring planks. Lower quality thinnings are supplied to local firewood merchants.

For livestock farmers, the edges of woodland also provide important shelter, a feature evermore important as weather extremes increase in frequency. David and Ruth run a small beef herd at Bron Haul.

"Farmers will often ask how quickly they can introduce livestock into woodland but it is much better for the woodland, and ultimately much better shelter, if livestock get the shelter from the fringes," David explained.

He and Ruth are working on transitioning into a model of continuous cover forestry, growing trees of different ages to create woodland that is continually regenerating.

"Because of the age, structure and species diversity it is a very resilient woodland with robust shelter existing on the edges."

In 2022, Bron Haul won the Royal Forestry Society Farm and Small Woodlands Best of Best Award. The owners now run two-day woodland management courses on their farm.

Geraint Jones, Farming Connect Forestry and Farm Woodland Specialist, who facilitated the event at Bron Haul, said David and Ruth's approach to planting trees had demonstrated that establishing woodland can be a viable option for farmers.

He emphasised that it is important farmers don't ignore their green infrastructure as by optimising the benefits of woodland they can improve economic and environmental performance.

"Trees are an important means of reducing carbon emissions and improving livestock health and welfare through provision of shelter and shade," he said.

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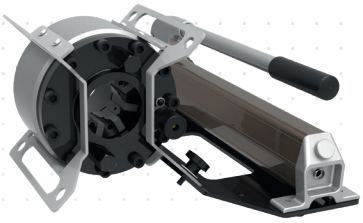

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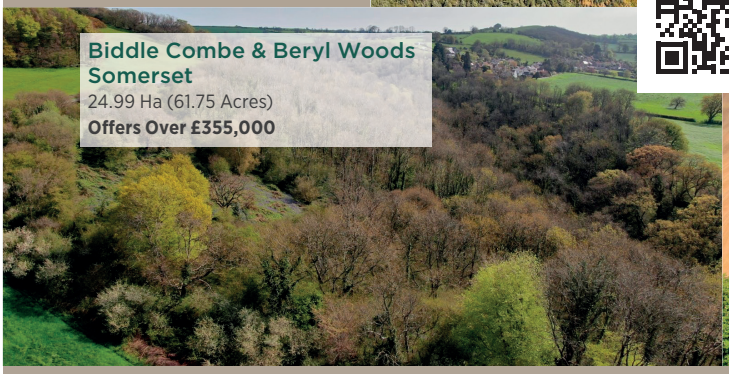

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New forest for the nation to improve access to green space

Government launches competition for a new national forest to improve public access to nature

A competition for a new national forest has been launched by Environment Secretary Steve Barclay, alongside the unveiling of two new Community Forests – in Derbyshire and the Tees Valley - as part of an ambitious package to help people across the country access nature.

Communities will be able to put their local areas forward to become a new national forest, with the winning location receiving up to £10 million to help fund the project.

This will build on the success of the National Forest in the Midlands, which spans 200 square miles across parts of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire.

Applicants will be assessed based on how the new forest would transform the local area, create habitats for wildlife, open up access to the countryside, and help the country meet net zero targets.

Successful bids are to be announced by Autumn 2024.

The Environment Secretary will set out further plans on improving access to green space later this week, including new Community Forests in Derbyshire and the Tees Valley, which will see around 370 hectares of woodland planted by 2025.

This is the latest step in the Government's plans to help people access nature, plant more trees and support nature recovery. Since joining the department earlier this month the Environment Secretary has set out his ambition to help more people get into the outdoors, enjoy the British countryside and preserve our vital natural heritage.

Setting out the plans, Mr Barclay said: "Public access to nature is so vital, which is why we pledged in our Environmental Improvement Plan that everyone should have access to green space or water within a 15-minute walk from their home – such as woodlands, wetlands, parks or rivers. This new forest for the nation will help make that happen.

"As a former Health Secretary, I have seen the benefits that nature has for people's physical and mental wellbeing. Bringing these spaces closer to where people live and work is a key priority for me personally."

On the importance of trees, he said: "The value of trees to people and nature has never been clearer. They are vital for our health and security. We can't do without them. We know that spending time in green spaces and getting hands on with nature has a positive impact on our health and wellbeing, which is why £5.77 million has been invested through our green social prescribing programme to tackle and prevent mental ill health. I will continue to make the case for investment in this area.

"THE VALUE OF TREES TO PEOPLE AND NATURE HAS NEVER BEEN CLEARER. THEY ARE VITAL FOR OUR HEALTH AND SECURITY. WE CAN'T DO WITHOUT THEM."

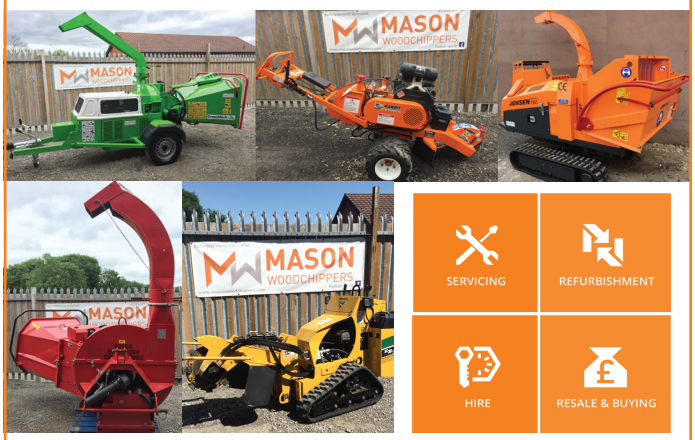
"I know how much nature matters, as the response to the terrible felling of the Sycamore Gap tree in Northumberland showed. Improving access, planting more trees, protecting nature and creating new green spaces is our pathway to achieving this.

"In my new role as Environment Secretary, I am determined to ensure we continue to push forward with this important work and leave the environment in a better state than we found it for future generations."

Healthy and resilient woodlands will also get further support through £16 million in government funding for the UK's world-leading forest scientists to address the challenges facing woodlands today – from the impacts of climate change to tree disease and pests such as ips beetles, Dutch elm disease and ash dieback.

The England Trees Action Plan and Environmental Improvement Plan set out ambitious targets to treble tree planting rates by the end of this Parliament and to achieve at least 16.5% of tree and woodland cover by 2050.

MASON WOODCHIPPERS



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Northern England missing out on wellness perks of urban tree cover

People in less affluent areas have lower levels of tree cover and higher risk of health problems from poor air quality, new online 'tree equity' map reveals.

An online map that for the first time shows inequalities in urban tree cover across the UK has illustrated how less affluent areas have fewer trees - and are subsequently missing out on their essential health benefits like cleaner air.

Neighbourhoods with the highest income levels have more than double the tree cover per person than less affluent neighbourhoods and have nearly 20% less of the toxic pollutant nitrogen dioxide (NO2).

In England, regional differences are present, with the 10 local authorities with the highest scores in the south, and the 10 with the lowest scores in the north. Some coastal areas also have lower levels of tree cover.

The news comes with the launch of a new free interactive tool which uses tree canopy data from Google, and six climate, health and socioeconomic indicators to generate a score from 0 to 100 for most urban neighbourhoods in the UK, known as the Tree Equity Score (TES). It shows a direct link between areas of lower tree cover to more pollution and poorer air quality.

The Woodland Trust has encouraged everyone to find the TES for their area and urged governments - nationally and locally - to integrate the data into policies and plans to ensure this disparity is tackled.

First launched by American Forests in the US in 2021, the UK is the first country that TES has expanded to as a partnership between American Forests, the Woodland Trust and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare.

Dr Darren Moorcroft, CEO at the Woodland Trust, said this is a "breakthrough" when it comes to targeting resources to areas critically in need of more trees.

He said: "This is a breakthrough moment for trees in the UK. For the first time everyone can see an inequity that is hidden in plain sight – access to the essential benefits of trees. Tree Equity Score shows that there are major differences in levels of tree cover between neighbourhoods and that these often follow socio-economic trends. Tree Equity Score is a tool for action to start addressing this inequity and ensure the essential benefits of trees can improve public health and climate resilience for all.

"More than 34,000 urban neighbourhoods are covered by the Tree Equity Score meaning that nearly 80% of the population can go online and find their score.

"There are numerous underlying reasons for tree inequality, and it is a serious problem in need of immediate solutions. We believe the tool will inspire people to get involved with local projects to plant and care for urban trees. We are calling on national and local governments to integrate tree equity into national and local policies and plans, and to fund and recruit more tree officers to address tree inequality."

The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare works with healthcare professionals and the wider public to help develop the knowledge, skills and tools people need to play their part in the transformation to sustainable healthcare.

"We know that trees have a huge positive impact on people's health and wellbeing, and healthcare providers are uniquely placed to champion access to these benefits," said Sarah Jordan, Director of Green Space for Health at the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare. "From individuals through to anchor institutions such as the NHS, Tree Equity Score can be used at any scale to help get trees where they're needed most and reduce health inequalities."

In the UK, a number of cities are already adopting Tree Equity, including Birmingham and Belfast, which have recently included actions on Tree Equity in city-level plans to increase tree cover. The tool was also demonstrated at COP28, the UN climate conference, with the goal of encouraging more cities throughout the globe to adopt the tool.

The Office for National Statistics recently estimated the annual economic value of broadleaved woodland in regulating air pollution in the UK was over £1bn - the highest of any habitat. Of this, the value of urban trees contributed more than half.

A drive on the Wildtrak side

Eamonn Wall takes the UK's most popular new Ford Ranger for a spin.

The all-new Ranger is built at a Ford factory in South Africa with Ford engines imported from Europe. Volkswagen were minor partners in its development and the new VW Amarok is also built in the same factory - basically a reskinned Ranger that uses the same engines.

The Ranger comes in two door (single cab) and four door (double cab) versions with a choice of three diesel engines, one petrol engine, and either part-time or full-time four-wheel drive. Prices start at £29,590 plus VAT and go all the way to £47,215 plus VAT. An extreme Raptor version costs around £60,000. Ford calls its diesel engines Ecoblue, and its petrol engines Ecoboost.

Last year 80% of Rangers sold in the UK were the higher specification Wildtrak model, which is the vehicle being reviewed here. There are now more expensive models than this one - Wildtrak X and Platinum. However, the starter price for the double cab is the XL model priced at £31,115 plus VAT, which comes with the least powerful engine, a single turbo 2 litre diesel four cylinder with 170 bhp.

To gain the 205 bhp engine, you need to go up to the Tremor model at £35,865 plus VAT, which also comes with the 10-speed automatic gearbox. The Wildtrak version costs £40,665 plus VAT, and also offers the additional choice of a V6 3-litre diesel engine with 240 bhp priced at £45,165 plus VAT.

The new Ranger has a very American influenced square box design and looks great. It is a big vehicle and makes a Discovery 4 look small, both are similarly square designs. The Ranger is a long vehicle at 5,370mm, 2,208mm wide and 1,922mm high. It is certainly best out of town in its natural countryside surroundings where its wide 12.9m turning circle is not an issue.

As with all pickups, it really is a specialist machine where the rear open area is a requirement, or its towing ability and off-road credentials are essential. They are not great vehicles for storing stuff inside and, for example, a step ladder that easily fits inside a Discovery cannot be carried by the double cab pickup.

Most foresters now drive pickups, encouraged by the lower BIK tax bands. This new Ranger will certainly appeal to a wide range of users as it has been so well designed to meet its many requirements. Its 32mpg average fuel consumption will not compete against the likes of a 55mpg Skoda Octavia, but if you really need a pickup then it's not too bad, I suppose.

The 2-litre version weighs 2,239kg and all versions can tow a 3,500kg braked trailer. The Raptor is limited to 2,500kg. The rear box has lights, lashing points and electric plug holes. Ford have added a rear sidestep to help you access the high box. The rear door has a spring to lighten its load and makes it easy to open and close.

The model I review here is the Wildtrak 205 bhp (500 Nm torque) with the standard 10-speed auto gearbox. The metallic paint costs £500 and the optional 20"

wheels £750. Wildtrak standard wheels are 18" fitted with 255/65 R18 tyres, which would probably be better at helping the ride with their thicker side walls.

The fancy stereo and screen add another £450, and the sliding power roller shutter (including the load box liner) costs £1,600. One-touch rear windows are £50 and finally the Technology Package adds £1,100, giving a grand total of £44,671 plus VAT (£53,605 inc VAT).

I like the square design look of the new Ranger and the interior design is very good too. The light switch is down on the right-hand side, so easy to find and not mixed up within the steering wheel stalks. You sit in comfortable seats with an elevated view out. Ground clearance is a good 237mm, but I did find the side steps a nuisance and would remove them to help egress/exit.

"MOST FORESTERS NOW DRIVE PICKUPS, ENCOURAGED BY THE LOWER BIK TAX BANDS."

The door handle is a novel design located within the door handle gap. It works very well. The door bins are large and useful. The dashboard comprises two computer screens. The one in front of the driver contains the usual fuel, water, and speed gauges. The rev counter is an odd small vertical bar.

The central dashboard screen is also well-designed. I was very impressed with the hands-free speech recognition phone facility, which is the best I have experienced and a joy to use.

When pulling off, the initial acceleration is only adequate at reaching 60mph in 10.5 seconds (it drops to a better 8.7 seconds in the V6d) with the auto gearbox running through its 10 cogs. Once on the move the vehicle never feels slow and runs along very nicely indeed. I did not get the opportunity to test its towing or off-roading abilities. It cruises nicely on the motorway with some wind noise. The mirrors are large and useful, and it is generally a quiet and relaxed vehicle to drive.

The Wildtrak model comes with two gloveboxes and, as with the other models, two pop out bottle holders at each end of the dashboard. The brakes were not as strong as expected, but you soon adjust to their ways. And, as with all pickups, the ride generated by its ladder frame chassis and leaf springs is a bit jiggly but again you get used to it. However, if you pop into an air sprung Discovery you realise just how smooth a Discovery is and how unsmooth a pickup is when unladen.

The Ranger has surprisingly good steering and does not roll about as much as I expected. In fact, it is a nice car to push along on twisting country roads and enjoys motorway work too. So, Ford can be proud of a job well done.

Eamonn Wall FICFor is a forestry and arboricultural consultant.

SMALL WOODLAND OWNER

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Wollemi pine promptings

Julian Evans encourages a keen eye and open mind to discover the hidden gems of your patch.

At the end of October, a major international conservation event took place in the National Pinetum, Bedgebury in Kent. Six wollemi pines were planted as part of ex situ conservation of this exceptionally rare tree. Every one of the 89 trees existing in the wild have been propagated and different sets of six of them are being distributed throughout the world to tree collections, arboreta and botanic gardens.

Forestry England's Bedgebury is the hub for the European phase of this work. It is a gold standard of conservation practice, and it is the wollemi pine story that prompted a thought to share in this Woodland Owner piece.

Wollemi pine was only known to science from the fossil record until 1994, when a park ranger came across them in a remote, narrow gorge some 150km northwest of Sydney. Access was extremely difficult owing to the steep sides, but looking down there was this group of unfamiliar trees, some as much as 40m tall! Somehow the trees had survived, indeed flourished, for millennia after millennia.

The present conservation effort was in part prompted by the ravages of the awful fires in Australia a few years ago which got into the gorge. Fortunately, damage was limited and one of the species' survival strategies – unusual for a conifer – to throw vigorous coppice was not needed. The great lesson for us as woodland owners is simple: keep our eyes open. Is there something in the property we own or manage which has gone unnoticed, unrecorded, even uncared for?

My own 'wollemi pine' is a tiny moss, only discernible with a 10x hand lens, which had not been found anywhere else in the county of Hampshire. Of course, I'm not suggesting every wood will have a plant waiting to be discovered, but I am suggesting that the more we can do to note, record, and care for what we have is part of our role as custodians. Local natural history groups, wildlife societies, archaeologists, historians, and even fellow foresters(!) can all enrich our knowledge.

In previous pieces I have encouraged you to look at old maps, tithe records, and aerial photographs for the signs of change. Acquisition deeds are also important, but the greatest benefit can come from inviting experts to look around. Almost always they are more than delighted to have a new patch to explore and their perception invariably adds to the body of knowledge.

I would extend this to artists and professional photographers who look at things quite differently from most of us and even to wood turners who see value in the discarded, the distended (burrs of trunks) and the disturbed (a blown tree). Appreciating what you own or care for immeasurably adds value and interest.

All this was prompted by wollemi pine, that for eons was lost but now is found.

HSE stresses the importance of protecting workers as cold weather sets in

Great Britain's workplace regulator, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), is stressing the importance of protecting workers during the cold weather.

John Rowe, HSE Head of Operational Strategy, said: "We're calling on all employers to take a sensible approach during the cold weather that is coming our way. There are lots of jobs that will be more difficult in these conditions. Most employers will recognise this and make appropriate accommodations for their staff. That is the right thing to do.

"It's also important employers ensure staff are working in a reasonable temperature. People working in uncomfortably cold environments are less likely to perform well and more likely to behave unsafely because their ability to make good decisions deteriorates."

Temperatures in indoor workplaces are covered by the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, which place a legal obligation on employers to provide a "reasonable" temperature in the workplace.

All employers are expected to ensure indoor workplaces are kept at a reasonable temperature. The Approved Code of Practice suggests the minimum temperature should normally be at least 16 degrees Celsius. If the work involves rigorous physical effort, the temperature should be at least 13 degrees Celsius.

John Rowe added: "Complying with the code of practice is the right thing for an employer to do. By maintaining a reasonable temperature, employers are likely to maintain the morale and productivity of their staff as well as improving health and safety."

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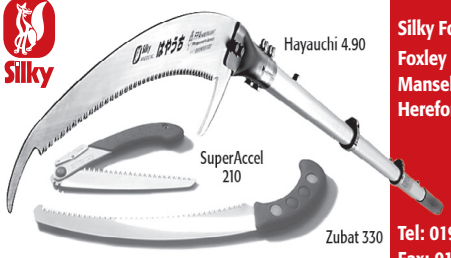

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FORESTRY IN PICTURES

Cutlers Wood Ltd, a bare root tree nursery in Ipswich, Suffolk, was launched by Confor member AJ Paul in January 2022.

The business was recently highlighted by Forestry Commission as a case study for successful use of the government's Tree Production Capital Grant. With this financial support, the nursery purchased several pieces of equipment and each step of the growing and harvesting process is now able to be mechanised.

The main production is centred around Hawthorn, Hazel, Oak, Sweet chestnut, Hornbeam and other hedgerow species. AJ is also growing a small area of novel species with a focus on climate resilience.

You can read more about Cutler's Wood on the Forestry Commission website.

Want to see your picture here?

Forestry in Pictures is a regular feature in FTN. For every issue, we select the most impacting photograph sent by a reader. If you have a photo you would like to see published here, please send your file to **ftn@confor.org.uk**. Please include your name, a short comment text to go with the picture, and an image credit.

Photos should relate to forestry and timber and be of high-quality (minimum resolution 300dpi). Exceptional pictures might be considered for the front cover of a future FTN issue.

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COMING UP IN FEBRUARY 2024 – GET INVOLVED

In February we will be focusing on Woodland Management & Business Diversification. Remember that FTN is your magazine – get in touch if you want to suggest editorial or give us feedback on articles we have published in the past. Confor members, send us your company's news updates or pitches for feature articles.

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