

FORESTRY & TIMBER NEWS

April / May 2024 Issue 122

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Times are changing



STUART GOODALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
CONFOR

Confor's Dinner and Awards is always a highlight for me. It's a great opportunity to catch up with familiar faces and to meet new people. It's inspiring to see the amazing individuals and organisations who've been put forward for recognition, and to celebrate with those who win.

The awards given out pay particular attention to the future. This focus is an important part of Confor's role; we work to promote knowledge sharing and timber markets, upskilling the workforce and securing future wood supplies to underpin investment and much more.

One big challenge we seek to overcome is the fact that many policymakers and politicians don't see the industry when it comes to forestry. Their typical points of reference have been stories about deforestation and the impactful marketing of native woodland. This lack of awareness is changing across the UK, and Scotland has been in the vanguard for some time now.

I've noted before that Scotland's pre-eminence could be under threat from England and my response when we were told at our Dinner by an MSP that Scotland was still the best place to do business, despite the recently slashed budget, was to challenge the assumption behind that statement and cite the positive developments taking place.

England is of course starting from a relatively low base, but the determination

to make it an attractive place to invest in planting and wood production is worthy of acknowledgement. The momentum will need to survive a likely change in government and strong lobbying for ministerial attention to be focused elsewhere.

However, I'm buoyed by the fact that civil servants and politicians now appear to get the need to tackle an ever-growing reliance on imports and recognise that income from sales of wood provides a long-term, environmentally friendly way to support management of woodland and rural jobs.

The contrast with what's happening in Scotland is evident in a recent report by the Climate Change Committee branding the Scottish Government's 2030 net zero goals as "no longer credible".

Meanwhile, Wales has a new first minister and cabinet, so it will be interesting to see how that plays out. Will they be persuaded to row back on policies like the provision for tree planting under the Sustainable Farming Scheme?

Turning to Northern Ireland, I'd like to highlight the work of Confor's chair for Northern Ireland James Hamilton Stubber who, ably supported by members, has challenged the minister and the civil service to get approvals in place for this year. As I write, it looks like James's dogged determination may have overcome bureaucratic hurdles.

Clearly governments shouldn't simply hand over public money, but when the delivery process becomes the obstacle to tackling the climate emergency, something is fundamentally wrong.

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A TROOP OF TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

John Bruce and Richard Hunter give an account of Confor's recent Forestry Taster Events for Military Veterans.

Career changers are a vital part of the solution to our shortage of new people entering forestry. Previous engagement with the military has shown that interest in forestry careers for those leaving active service is high, prompting Confor to organise a series of events dedicated to veterans.

We were able to work with different groups such as Help for Heroes to advertise these taster days, offering an exclusive view into the workings of the industry to military career changers. The four events were spread across England and Scotland; in Inverness, Lockerbie, Thetford, and Hereford. Each location was chosen due to its proximity to either forestry or military hubs.

Delegates came from all three branches of military service, some still with a year or two to go, others at the point of leaving, and some having already left and seeking a second career. In total, we had 40 applications to attend and even more interested parties requesting information on forestry.

Lockerbie

The first day near Lockerbie started at Drumlanrigg Estate (north of Dumfries), with Jim Colchester and his staff giving attendees an overall view of forestry, including the pressures of land ownership, impact

of grants for planting, business structure in the industry and species choice.

After lunch the delegates were hosted by Forest and Land Scotland in Ae Forest by Andy Brown. Here, they visited an establishment site and heard lots of discussion about ecology, soil carbon, ground preparation, growth rates, and deer pressure. Finally, the day ended at Ae deer larder for a demonstration on preparing deer for the game dealer.

The next taster day centred around harvesting and was hosted by Joe McKnight of Dick Brothers, with a visit by Dave Godfrey of Mesta Ltd. Dave is himself a veteran and was able to talk about his experience of transitioning from the army to forestry.

During the site visit, attendees were able to witness a forwarder and harvester at work. After lunch they had a tour of the James Jones & Sons Sawmill at Lockerbie, guided by Ian Stuart, another veteran. The intention was to show the full 'seed to sawn' process and that forestry doesn't stop at the forest gate.

Our final day at Lockerbie brought the group to Komatsu Forest, where they enjoyed a tour of the workshop and a chance to use a machinery simulator. In addition to talks from Forestry Commission's James Anderson and AW Jenkinson's Andrew Leslie, the delegates met with Rob Lawson,

a Warehouse Technician at Komatsu, who is also a veteran.

Inverness

The Inverness event began at Seafield Estate for a general discussion of forestry and site visit hosted by Will Anderson. In the afternoon, the delegates were taken to an FLS establishment site to see newly planted Scots Pine and followed it up with a trip to the FLS deer larder, where they heard from FLS Ranger and veteran Cieran Watson.

Another former military serviceman Warwick Talyor, now a Tilhill employee, led the next day's visit to an active harvesting site, showing off both a harvester and forwarder owned by Mellies Forestry. Delegates spoke with the operator and had the opportunity to sit in the machine.

The afternoon was spent at James Jones and Sons at Forres. Here the attendees could see the manufacture of I-beams to better understand how timber is used in a modern and sustainable way.

The last day in Inverness started with a tour of the harbour, hosted by Neil Stoddart of Creel Consulting, who explained the shipping of timber. The delegates then had presentations at Great Glen House by FLS staff Brian Stacey, Colin Leslie and Eelco de Jong, plus Scottish Woodlands Forester Casey Keller. This was followed by lunch with



“THIS WAS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY, AND I AM GLAD THAT I TOOK IT UP. THIS EVENT ALSO ENABLED ME TO UNDERSTAND AND BETTER FOCUS ON WHICH AREA OR GROUP WITHIN THE SECTOR THAT I WANT TO GO INTO.”

- MAJOR CAMERON PROUDFOOT, SCOTS GUARDS

local foresters from Scottish Woodlands and Tilhill so the potential career changers had to opportunity to make contacts within the industry.

Lieutenant Colonel Brian O'Neill, Euro-Atlantic Security Policy Joint Unit, said about the visits: “The last two and a half

days - during rather challenging weather - have been an excellent insight to the public and private forestry industry.

“From the establishment of a forest through to the production of timber products, and everything that goes into each stage in between; it’s definitely a ‘teams within teams’ where the people of the industry are proud of what they do.

“I am taking the liberty of speaking for all of the group on this visit, but it was especially reassuring (more of a relief) that an array of opportunities are available for service leavers and veterans (mostly (but not all) in mid-life) within an industry that seeks to make use of our experiences and

provide further training too. So a tremendous thanks to all of the team for making that clear.”

Thetford

The Thetford events started with Rachel Riley, David Hooton and James Upson covering the work of Forestry England and providing a visit into the deer larder, thereby demonstrating the complexities of forestry and deer management in a forest with high public access. The morning finished with a visit to an underplanting site with discussions including Dothistroma and species resilience, followed by a tree planting activity.

The afternoon moved onto a trip to Carbon Plantations, hosted by Nigel Blanford, Matthew Riddiford and their team. This was just as successful, highlighting the many parts of the forestry world and innovations aimed at sequestering more carbon, improving soil and biodiversity on degraded farmland.

Day two focused on harvesting and timber production, as well as some of the supporting functions in Civil and Mechanical Engineering. This morning involved tours of the workshops and in on the ground in the forest to see both civils and harvesting in action.

Thanks go to Clare Nichols, District Forester; Paul Saunders, Workshop Manager; Gareth Biggins, Development Woodland Officer; Pasco Warner, Civil Engineer; and Scott Cooper, FMO Supervisor. Plus Beth Disley, a recent convert to forestry after a career in the RAF.

All the delegates commented that it was great to hear directly from those who have already transitioned into forestry. The af-

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ternoon visit was held at Thomson Sawmill run by Laura Grimwood and Jamie Thomson. Everyone was impressed by the technology and innovation that optimises the use of the timber coming to the mill - the sheer range of products and the value-added part of the business was amazing to see.

Finally, the attendees were taken to Sennowe Estate to be hosted by Tom Cook and Fergus Williams, CEO of Walking with the Wounded and also an ex-army man. This day focused on mainly coniferous woodlands managed as continuous cover under single tree selection.

The group were later joined by Sid Cooper, who was a Woodland Officer in Norfolk for many years and was able to illustrate the public sector's role in supporting and regulating the private sector.

Commenting afterwards, Sergeant Anthony Rogers, RAF Regiment Training Wing, said: "Personally, I found the event very informative. Given the nature of the timber industry and [Forestry Commission], with the number of roles and the varied titles, it was very helpful gaining an understanding.

"It was also helpful moving out into the woodlands meeting key leaders within these areas, be they the civil service or private industry such as at the Euston Estate and Sennowe Park Estate.

"If the event has done one thing, it has cemented my want to become a member of this industry."

Hereford

This event began with a visit to the Forest of Dean, where Adam Drew (Head of Land

"THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR AN EXCELLENT INSIGHT TO FORESTRY. IT WAS REALLY WELL PLANNED, AND I APPRECIATED THE WAY THE PROGRAMME FLOWED."

- COLONEL AB PHILIPS, DCOMD 51 INFANTRY

Management) provided a sound overview of forestry management and careers in Forestry England including the civil service jobs portal.

The day also included Ian Harvey discussing deer control and their state-of-the-art deer larder, and then Gareth Youell on civil engineering and the range of work the team covers, from forest roads and timber facilities, to recreation facilities and career opportunities.

After learning about the recreation part of the business at Beechenhurst Forest Centre and the millions of annual visitors, the delegates went out with Beat Forester Dave Sykes to learn about the ingredients of successful restock sites. Delegates also heard from Nick Adams and Mark Bevan from Kilmaha Forestry and Countryside Management about a contractor's view of forestry.

Day two began at harvesting and planting sites in Whitfield Estate, run by Tom Blythe and Gareth Edwards of Pryor and Rickett Silviculture. This included input from two Development Woodland Officers from the FC, Mark Beer and Tom King, who spoke positively about their career changes and how the Level 6 apprenticeship programme has enabled them to retrain as professional foresters.

Richard Harley, FC Woodland Resilience

Officer and also a military veteran, joined the visitors to talk about his career transition. The delegates were given a tour of Pontrilas sawmill by Mark Price, other senior staff, and retired Forester Paul Johnston, who willingly shared so much knowledge and insight around forestry and timber.

The final day was again hosted by Tom and Gareth of Pryor and Rickett Silviculture, but this time at Garnons Estate. The visit was to showcase the working relationship between Forestry Commission and the private sector through incentives and regulation. We were joined by John Evans who is the local Field Manager for the FC and David Jam, Deer Advisor for England. It was great to see in action how grant money is being spent to make positive actions on the ground, from improving deer management to woodland health and biodiversity.

The feedback from all of the tasters was overwhelmingly positive.

With so much positivity from both the veterans and industry about these events, Confor will be looking into how to make them an annual occurrence.

The Scotland events were funded by Scottish Forestry, while the England events were supported by Forestry Commission. Our thank are extended to them and to the private sector representatives who contribute time, people, and often lunch.



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STILL PLAYING THE WAITING GAME

Jon Garson, Confor Policy & Public Affairs Officer, gives an update on our political engagement and the key events with potential to affect the sector.

So, the long running “will they, won’t they” saga regarding an early staging of the next UK general election seems to have reached its conclusion. They won’t.

Unless we are witnessing the greatest political sleight of hand of a generation, the Chancellor using the words ‘October election’ or the PM repeating his ‘working assumption’ phrase in Prime Minister Questions that the election would be in the second half of the year, plus the outright rejection of an election on 2 May, tells us we will be subject to a lengthy campaign covering the summer and an election no earlier than October.

The government rejecting a spring election was by no means a foregone conclusion. All reports indicate that there was quite the debate within No. 10 with strong proponents on both sides. It seems that the deciding factor was the state of the economy.

The government has had some good economic news recently, including on one of the PM’s five pledges with inflation falling to its lowest level since 2021 at 3.4%. This has seen mortgage rate deals begin to come down on the expectation that the Bank of England will reflect the drop in inflation with a cut in interest rates in the near future.

The reason this didn’t trigger an early election was that this good news is offset by the fact that the UK is still in a technical recession, while inflation and interest rates are still high by historic standards. When this is combined with the fact that the two 2p cuts in National Insurance in the last two Budget events have not had any measurable positive impact in the polls means that the landscape is still challenging for the government on the economic front.

With all parties now focusing on their respective manifestos and every decision viewed through the lens of its ability to secure (or lose) votes we are now in a period where the political side of government is less focused on governing.

Confor’s focus over the coming months will be to ensure that the value and contribution of productive forestry and the increased use of home-grown wood is communicated to parties during the election cycle - while also not forgetting the importance of day-to-day engagement with governments across the UK.

In the last few weeks we have met with Rebecca Pow, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Na-

ture) at Defra, and have secured quarterly scheduled meetings with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands in Scotland, Mairi Gougeon.

In the meeting with Rebecca Pow, we asked that she explore the potential for farmers to plant land for timber production that could be returned to agriculture after harvest, the aim being to reach out to farmers who are put off by permanent land-use change. We also asked that Defra use its influence in the Woodland Carbon Code to promote adjustments to the additionality rules that Confor had suggested which would bring them into line with international best practice and facilitate greater amounts of productive planting being accepted for carbon credits. It was also agreed that Confor would lead on work to attract greater investment into planting in England.

The regular meetings with Mairi Gougeon are intended to keep a focus on maximising woodland creation in Scot-

land and build on the positive partnership working between Confor and Woodland Trust Scotland, which has secured repeated and widespread media coverage on TV, radio, newspapers and online.

A planned meeting and site visit with Toby Perkins, Shadow Labour Minister for Nature and Rural Affairs with members in Northern England unfortunately had to be postponed due to voting on amendments in the Rwanda Bill at Westminster, but we aim to reschedule this meeting soon after the Easter recess, and Toby Perkins attended the AGM of our All Party Group at Westminster where Confor briefed MPs and Peers on key issues in the industry across the UK.

This engagement is an important part of our advocacy efforts as we look to build relationships with Labour and the key officials who will determine Labour’s priorities as government should they win the election. Confor is also planning to attend

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Clockwise from left: Rebecca Pow; Mairi Gougeon; Toby Perkins and Vaughan Gething.



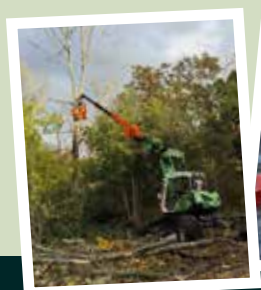


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the Labour conference in Liverpool again after the success of last year.

We have also reached out to the new Welsh First Minister Vaughan Gething to congratulate him on his appointment and to extend an offer to work with him and his new government on our shared goals. On his appointment, the new First Minister brought in a number of changes to his cabinet and to the remit of a number of

Ministries. Under our National Manager for Wales Elaine Harrison, we will be assessing which Ministries have responsibility for forestry and seeking meetings with key Cabinet Secretaries and key officials to establish new relationships, and to ensure the momentum we are seeing in Wales is not lost in the transition to the new administration.

Similarly, there has been an opportunity to advance forestry in Northern Ireland

with the restoration of the devolved government. A key first action is to secure approvals for woodland creation this planting season.

As we have done previously, Confor will produce a manifesto for the Westminster election, and we are keen to assist members in engaging with their local candidates. If you would be interested in working with us, please do get in touch (Jon.Garson@confor.org.uk).

MORE TREE COVER COMING TO THE WELSH COUNTRYSIDE

The new requirements for trees on farms in Wales under the Sustainable Farming Scheme have been a recent topic of widespread debate. National Manager **Elaine Harrison** shares the key messages from Confor's consultation response.



The Welsh Government consultation into the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) recently concluded. This was the final step in delivering the SFS, which crucially calls for a mandatory 10% woodland cover on farmland in Wales. The consultation set out proposals detailing how farmers will be rewarded for responding to the climate and nature emergencies, as well as producing food in a sustainable way, and how the scheme meets the objectives of Sustainable Land Management (SLM).

Confor prepared an industry response in collaboration with members in Wales. The Welsh Confor committee has 17 members representing the breadth of the Welsh forestry and timber industry and this consultation was shared via the committee and discussed during in-person committee meetings.

The consultation was formed of 19 questions. For forestry to support the agricultural sector and to contribute to the SLM objectives, we felt that clear signposting would be needed to support farmers towards forestry professionals to seek economic opportunities for them. We felt it would be advantageous to provide case studies of ways to manage woodlands and trees on farms.

We raised opportunities for learning, via the CPD element, for farmers to learn about long term woodland management as well as how to improve the profitability and improvements of habitats through good silvicultural management.

We also sought clarity on the permitted species mixtures required for habitat management areas, the timelines for site management plans, and the implications of long-term forestry rotations for tenant farmers, if they could be included.

With existing woodlands being included we identified that the scale, production, and accessibility would all be influencing factors in these woodlands being economically viable for management. We additionally recommended that costs of access grants and subsidised woodland management plans should be considered.

We warned that a review of the format of the carbon calculator was needed as farming and woodland calculators are often different, owing to dissimilar carbon cycles. For example, woodlands can score high for many years and then drop when harvested; there is therefore a risk farmers may not manage their woodlands for fear of impacting their carbon levels.

We recommended reviewing planning permission restrictions with new plantings,

to include and to refer to the use of biomass and short rotation forestry as a viable management option, and to ensure adequate support with agroforestry and the review of planting marginal land and priority habitats in less favourable conditions.

Overall, we welcome the 10% tree cover rule, particularly as the requirements allow for a range of management practices and unplanted areas are removed from the land calculations.

Clear guidance will be needed on species choice versus productivity and economic return to ensure farmers can make well-informed decisions right for their business. Consideration will be needed to allow farmers to collaborate to work at a landscape scale, to provide woodlands at a scale that is needed for Wales.

Additionally, we made it clear that the forestry sector is well-suited and ready to provide support to farmers undergoing this transition.

Confor is working with Welsh Government post-consultation on how to drive this scheme forward. Welsh Government have confirmed the consultation results will be concluded in May and that a close working relationship with stakeholders will continue in the development of the SFS.

INDUSTRY MARKS SAD PASSING OF FORESTER AND COUNTRYMAN LORD CLINTON

Lord Clinton, one of the West Country's most prominent and forward-thinking landowners and a long-standing supporter of commercial forestry, has died at the age of 89.

Born Gerard Nevile Mark Fane on 7 October 1934, Lord Clinton became the 22nd Baron Clinton in 1965, taking on responsibility for 25,000 acres across three estates in North and East Devon, collectively known as Clinton Devon Estates.

Forestry and farming were the keystones to his management of the Estates. He was a committee member of the Devon and Cornwall branch of Confor, President of the Association of Professional Foresters from 1987 to 1991, and was a former member of the Timber Growers Association.

The Clinton family's connections with forestry go back generations with his great grandfather, the 21st Baron Clinton, planting the Forestry Commission's first tree in woodland at Eggesford, North Devon in 1919, the year the Commission was set up.

John Wilding, MBE, Director of Forestry and Reserves at Clinton Devon Estates, said Lord Clinton commemorated the 50th, 75th and 100th anniversary of that event with the ceremonial planting of trees in the same forest, most recently at the Forestry Commission centenary in 2019.

Lord Clinton was a steadfast proponent of the importance of growing commercial timber, regularly speaking on the subject during his time in the House of Lords and consistently supporting the benefits of commercial mixed forestry across the South West and beyond.

As well as policy, he maintained a close interest in the practical side of woodland management, always keeping a copy of the Clinton Devon Estates' annual operations plan in his vehicle and, with Lady Clinton,

regularly attending the biennial APF machinery exhibition.

Mr Wilding noted that Lord Clinton kept a close eye on timber prices. "The recovery of timber values in recent times, following years of tight pricing was something that gave him a great deal of satisfaction," he said. "Lord Clinton was very much an advocate for a long-term forest policy on the Estates and planting for timber for the next generation. To see highly productive crops he established in the 1960s produce quality timber and obtain good prices gave him a great deal of satisfaction."

During his lifetime, Lord Clinton secured the long-term sustainability of the 700-year-old Clinton Devon Estates - the largest in family ownership in Devon - turning a traditional landed estate into a leading land management enterprise fit for the 21st century.

His modernising efforts were widely acknowledged, helping the Clinton Devon Estates to win numerous awards under his stewardship, including being judged four times winner of the Sunday Times Best Small Companies to Work for, three times winner of the Queen's Award for Enterprise in the category for Sustainable Development and a recipient of the 2012 Food and Farming Industry Awards.

Clinton Devon Estates comprises farmland and forestry in East and North Devon including woodlands of national importance and the 2,800-acre Pebblebed Heaths and Otter Estuary in East Devon - now designated a National Nature Reserve, part of the newly named Kings' Series of

nature reserves.

Projects undertaken during Lord Clinton's lifetime include a major residential development, Plumb Park, at Exmouth, which saw the creation of more than 250 homes on Estate land and the building of an innovative Estate Office set in Grade 1 listed parkland at Bicton.

During a long and busy working life, Lord Clinton held high office in a wide range of local, regional and national organisations and was a member or supporter of many others. He was active in the House of Lords between 1965 and 1999 and served as a Justice of the Peace for twenty years until 1983 and as a Deputy Lieutenant of Devon from 1977. He sat on the Council of the Duchy of Cornwall from 1968 to 1979.

Lord Clinton saw himself as a countryman first and foremost and took a close interest in the tenanted and in-hand farming enterprises on the Estate, particularly the Devon Red Cattle. In his personal time Lord Clinton enjoyed fishing and had an abiding passion for horse racing and sailing.

He leaves his wife, Nicola, and three children, the Hon Charles Patrick Rolle Fane Trefusis, who will succeed him, and daughters Caroline and Henrietta.

In an afterword to the official history of the barony, Lord Clinton wrote: "The historical background to the Clinton title is embedded in holding land. As a trustee for life of the Clinton Estate, it has been of fundamental importance to me to manage and build on all that I inherited from my great grandfather so that I, in turn, might pass on a thriving estate to the next generation."

MEMBER UPDATE

LOOKING FORWARD TO A SUMMER OF SHOWS



Eliza Hibbins-Cline,
Membership &
Marketing Manager

Spring is here and the Confor Dinner and Awards is over for another year. To those who attended, thank you for coming; the room felt so alive with the buzz of industry networking! To those who couldn't attend, I hope you enjoy the write up in this issue!

A big shoutout to Jason Wilkins, based in Cardigan, for creating such beautiful awards for our winners! Please find his work at www.oldforgecrafts.com.

If you have any feedback regarding the evening, please contact me at members@confor.org.uk.

I want to remind our Members that if they wish to promote their business, for free, you can contact me at any time to learn more about getting involved in our Social Spotlight, a chance for you to share your story with our audience via our social channels! It's definitely a perk of being a Member so please make use of it!

In upcoming news, we will be hosting the business hub again at RWAS in July. I hope to see a lot of our Welsh Members there! We will be in a new spot at the showground, so keep an eye out for future information on where to find us for a cup of tea!

As always, if you have any queries about your membership or want to know how you can get more out of being a Confor member, please get in touch!

Contact

Eliza on 07918 880285
or email eliza@confor.org.uk



APF DRAWS CLOSER

Exhibition Secretary
Ian Millward brings us
up-to-date with what's
happening at APF this year.

APF 2024 takes place back at the Ragley Estate, Warwickshire again on 19-21 September. Exhibitor bookings are coming in daily and as I write this in late March, we have just passed the 200th exhibitor milestone. Bookings on the demonstration circuit are particularly strong with over 80% of the 1,800m circuit already booked.

The exhibition is not just about buying new equipment but is the best place to meet old friends and colleagues and to network and catch up with the latest news and what's happening in the industry. Confor will be putting on a series of topical seminars and will hold its AGM on Thursday 19 September.

Nearly every association involved in forestry, woodlands and arboriculture will be at APF including the Arboricultural Association, British Christmas Tree Growers, Institute of Chartered Foresters, Forestry Contracting Association, Forest Industry Safety Accord, National Coppice Federation, Forestry Commission, Royal Forestry Society, Association Of Fencing Industries, Small Woods Association, Landworkers Alliance, Lantra and Focus on Forestry First. You will not find such a comprehensive gathering anywhere else.

We try to keep moving forward with events and competitions so there is always something new for you to see and do. For APF 2024 we have a larger range than ever, not least the return of axe throwing and the UK Forwarder Driving Championships. Enjoy the Husqvarna world pole climbing championships, the A W Jenkinson and Tilhill European chainsaw carving championships, the APF tree climbing championships, the British Open speed fencing competition, the APF Lumberjack championships, the British Open Fencing competition, British Horse Loggers, the World log to leg pole lathe championship, a huge traditional woodland crafts area, have-a-go tree climbing, and our Forest Worker Zone.

With 300 exhibitors, 23,000 visitors and £80 million of equipment expected, it is by far the largest woodland, forestry, arboriculture, fencing, trees and timber show in the UK, with machines and equip-

ment on show for all situations from forest scale to small woods, estates and single trees. If you want advice on woodlands then forest managers such as Tilhill, Pryor and Ricket Silviculture and Euroforest will be on hand to help. APF 2024 is a one stop shop for all your woodland needs.

If that wasn't enough, then as a Confor member you get in for free! Just produce your current membership card on the gate. You have no hope of seeing everything in one day so why not stay for two or three? Our on-site campsite is only 50m from the show - book a pitch now via the ticket section on our website www.apfexhibition.co.uk.

FOREST INDUSTRIES EDUCATION AND PROVIDENT FUND: FIND US IN THE CONFOR TENT

The Tombola returns to APF in 2024 to raise funds for the Forest Industries Education and Provident Fund to enable us to continue our support of career development within the industry. The Trustees will be in touch with exhibitors asking to request prize donations in due course.



CELEBRATING LEADERS OF THE FORESTRY AND WOOD-USING INDUSTRY

The winners of the Confor Awards 2024 received accolades at our annual industry dinner in Edinburgh last month.

Future forestry leaders, great communicators and inspiring innovators were honoured alongside a dedicated servant of the industry at Confor's largest-ever Dinner & Awards event, held at Surgeons Quarter, Edinburgh on 12 March.

Speaking ahead of the event, Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall said the evening was an opportunity to look ahead positively to the future. He commented: "This is a resilient industry, and amidst all the challenges we face, it is more important than ever to have representatives to champion our work and to realise the significant potential that exists across our sector."

Rodney Shearer of Elsoms Trees won the top award for Dedicated Service to Forestry. With close to four decades' worth of experience in the industry, Rodney's expertise and vision is recognised as the force behind the huge planting of new Caledonian pinewoods between 1988 and 2020 among countless other achievements for seed collection and nursery innovation.

continued on p18







continued from p16

He said: "I was surprised but honoured to receive the Confor Dedicated Service to Forestry Award. I must give thanks to all my colleagues and family who have worked with me in the production and sale of over 200 million trees throughout my 40-year career.

"Looking to the future I am currently the Managing Director of new tree nursery Elsoms Trees and I am excited to see what I can achieve with an experienced team dedicated to the production of trees suitable for the increasing demands of forestry."

Rosanna Curtis, Senior Consultant at Reheat, won the Tom A Bruce-Jones Memorial Award for Future Leader in the Forest Industry. She works across a range of specialisms and has made a particular success of reviving the Northwoods forestry support initiative, where she has delivered genuinely exceptional results from a standing start.

Tomorrow's Forests was the winner of the Changing Attitudes Award for their work producing quality content highlighting the vital role of forestry. The business is passionate about providing educational insights into how the sector operates and the vital ecosystem and societal services that it provides.

"THIS IS A RESILIENT INDUSTRY, AND AMIDST ALL THE CHALLENGES WE FACE, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO HAVE REPRESENTATIVES TO CHAMPION OUR WORK AND TO REALISE THE SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL THAT EXISTS ACROSS OUR SECTOR." **STUART GOODALL**

Rainbow Professional Ltd won the Net Zero Award for the development of their biodegradable tree shelters, particularly the Rainbow Terra. The goal of the shelter is to eliminate the need for recycling and mitigate the climatic impact of conventional plastics.

Daniel Iddon, SAF Woodland Management, scooped the Science & Technology prize and has impressed by bringing eDNA testing into the mainstream conversation around understanding the benefits of and mimicking woodland soils. He has as a deep passion for changing current thinking on planting practices and soil health.

Daniel was unfortunately unable to attend the event and the award was collected on his behalf by Anthony Geddes MICFor.

Gordon Brown MICFor of TreeStory picked up the Institute of Chartered For-

esters Professional Forester of the Year Award as a passionate advocate for professionalism who encourages all his staff to pursue chartered status. Gordon developed the TreeStory Woodland Charter to ensure all their projects put nature first and has experience spanning the public, charity and private sectors.

The dinner also heard a video message from Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Mairi Gougeon MSP, and a live speech from Jim Fairlie MSP, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity. Mr Fairlie described forestry as a "dynamic industry with sustainability at its core" and said it was vital to Scotland's climate change ambitions.

He recognised industry concerns about the 40% reduction in the Scottish Government budget for woodland creation in 2024/25 but said ministers were "doing everything we can in straitened times".



Winners: Gordon Brown MICFor (far left) of TreeStory picked up the Institute of Chartered Foresters Professional Forester of the Year Award; Tomorrow's Forests (above left) was the winner of the Changing Attitudes Award; Rainbow Professional Ltd (left) won the Net Zero Award; Rodney Shearer (above) of Elsoms Trees won the top award for Dedicated Service to Forestry and Rosanna Curtis (right), Senior Consultant at Reheat, won the Tom A Bruce-Jones Memorial Award for Future Leader in the Forest Industry.

Mr Fairlie thanked the forestry industry for its work and said there was a record number of approvals for new planting in the system (around 14,000 hectares). He added: "It's critical we make the most of the available funds this year and get as much planted as possible. Keeping up momentum increases the case for more funding in future."

Later, Confor CEO Stuart Goodall highlighted the deep industry concerns over the budget cut, noting that nurseries would have to make decisions soon about how many



young trees to grow for the coming years, and without additional funding being made available quickly nurseries would inevitably reduce their production, 'baking in' a significant reduction in future tree supply and meaning woodland creation targets would be significantly undershot for at least the next 3-4 years.

He warned Scotland that

Anthony Geddes collected the Science & Technology award on behalf of Daniel Iddon from SAF Woodland Management.

its much vaunted position as the best place to plant trees and invest in wood production in the UK could not be guaranteed because there had been real progress made on fast-tracking approvals in England and work with industry to develop a National Wood Strategy for England and a Timber in Construction Roadmap, while Scotland was falling back following the funding cut and was at risk of standing still at best in the coming years.

Confor would like to thank the event sponsors: Forestry Commission, Forestry & Land Scotland, the Institute of Chartered Foresters, James Jones & Sons, Scottish Woodlands Ltd, CarbonStore Ltd and Green-tech.





A GROWING REPUTATION

Rosanna Curtis, Senior Consultant at Reheat, was awarded the Tom A Bruce-Jones Memorial Award for the Future Leader in the Forest Industry at the Confor Dinner & Awards 2024.

How do you feel about winning the award?

It is slightly surreal to have won such a prestigious and beautiful award!

The recognition means a lot to me because it highlights the support and opportunities I have had from a huge range of people throughout my career so far. I am standing on a lot of shoulders! The whole team at Reheat has provided me with the support required to deliver on expectations and the individuals and organisations behind Northwoods are inspirational and generous with their time, knowledge, and networks. This has been crucial to the impact we have had so far.

The wider forestry sector has also been very supportive, which has boosted the impact the team and I have had with our work and led to many exciting conversations.

Has this always been where your career was headed?

A career in the forestry industry was admittedly never a specific objective for me. I have always been interested in land management, sustainability, and rural economies and I am lucky enough that my work includes all of these! Forestry has a unique capacity to bring these things together and boost our progress to become more sustainable and improve our resilience to, mitigation of, and adaptation to climate change.

My work covers several industries and sometimes it can be hard to see where one ends and the next begins. As time passes, the more I realise that this is not unique in the industry. The forestry sector is hugely diverse with an extraordinary number of multi disciplinarians. I am proud to work in the industry as one of them and to champion forestry and the sector across my work.

How do you bring leadership qualities into your role?

I have benefitted from many opportunities and challenges which I have been encouraged and supported

to rise to. I have only been able to rise to these because others have been generous with their time and knowledge, passing on their passion, experiences, and expertise in such a way that has allowed me to learn and develop.

I hope to emulate this example and stimulate constructive discussion, collaboration, and development in others by enabling them to grow in their roles and deliver impactful work as well as encourage others to provide opportunities for growth.

What has been the biggest achievement of your career so far?

This award is a pretty special one as it represents how all the small things we do as a team can add up to create impact and momentum! A lot of this work has been undertaken under the rejuvenated banner of Northwoods, a woodland initiative re-establishing itself in the North East and Yorkshire area.

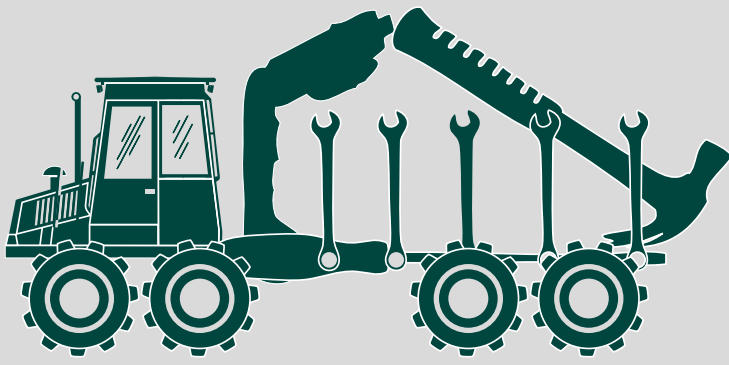
Every time we deliver something under Northwoods, we receive positive and constructive feedback as to how we have made a difference to those that have engaged, along with ideas and actions we can take to go further and deliver more. Each of these is an achievement along with a challenge to do more, better and quicker, which we are working hard to rise to.

What comes next?

I hope we can continue to make an impact with our work under Northwoods, developing relationships and 'turning the screw' so that the momentum we have built supporting all sorts of forestry stakeholders is not lost.

We have developed a strong platform and network which intersects and resonates with a diverse group of interested individuals and I would love to build on our successes to date. This can only happen with the support and knowledge of others in the sector, and I am very much looking forward to working with industry to achieve this and help to support and grow the forest economy not only in the North East and Yorkshire region, but more widely.





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A NEW SEASON OF INNOVATION

April Armstrong, Confor National Manager for Scotland, gives an account of this year's Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies Spring series of events.

The Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies (SFTT) is Scotland's Industry Leadership Group (ILG) with the objective to identify ways in which the forest industry in Scotland, working with the Scottish Government, can boost sectoral growth and the economy as a whole.

It seeks to do this through constructive dialogue and the provision of opportunities to discuss the industry's needs and to identify opportunities where support and input from government can add value. The ILG membership comprises leading figures from the private sector in Scotland and senior representatives from the public sector who have national and international expertise on global trends and issues, and the niche areas where Scotland has global competitiveness.

With funding from Scottish Forestry, the SFTT ILG runs two annual series of evening events aimed to showcase the latest technologies and innovations in the forestry sector, as well as providing an opportunity for audiences to hear about and discuss current issues and receive sector updates. We are delighted, at Confor, to host these events as they act as an excellent platform for both members and non-members to network.

The spring series got off to an excellent start with the Highlands and Islands Forest Industry Cluster (HIFIC) event on 27 Feb-

ruary at the University of Highlands and Islands. Guests were greeted at the front door by the Scotlog Volvo E HGV loaded with timber and ready to start its evening shift. To accompany this, Neil Stoddart provided a dynamic presentation showcasing decarbonisation of timber transport.

HIFIC also welcomed Naill MacLennan from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to a full auditorium. Niall spoke about Fire Management in relation to forestry and preventative/control measures. Neil Crookston then presented on Forestry Graduate Schemes and provided a great showcase for the success of bringing much needed, new recruits into the industry. Following the presentations our chair, Claire Wightman, led a lively discussion panel. There was a hot meal prior to the event and afterwards guests enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the topics over chocolate fudge cake and hot drinks.

The second event in the series was the Mid-Scotland event hosted at Stirling Court Hotel on 5 March. The evening kicked off with soup, sandwiches and an opportunity to network. Ross Kennedy from RTS provide case studies on and approaches to diffuse pollution with some much-appreciated humour and Jim Birley from Scottish Wood provided a spoken market update on Scottish hardwoods and specialist softwoods.

The following evening, South Scotland opened its doors to attendees at the Dryfesdale hotel in Lockerbie. Two of our speakers covered approaches to deer management, which was timely due to the ongoing Scottish government consultation on managing deer for nature and climate; Ben Harrower of BH Wildlife Consultancy presented on Using TI Drones to census deer populations and James Hammond from NatureScot covered 'Deer Management: Regulation Now and in the Future'. The final presentation was delivered by Bill Fisher of Forestry and Land Scotland titled 'Using LIDAR in the Galloway Forest - its potential use in understanding and planning harvesting works and operational sites more effectively'.

And last, but not least, the North East held its evening event on 20 March at Thainstone House Hotel. Simon Coleman presented on paperless delivery notes and an introduction to LogR and Guy Philips, managing director of Highland Heritage Woodwork, gave an overview of the methods and materials they use and products they create fittingly titled 'From Forest to Front Door'.

At three of the events, we had updates provided by the regional Scottish Forestry conservators - Doug Howieson for South Scotland, Cameron Maxwell for Mid Scotland and Steven Hutcheon for the North East. These timely presentations provided clarity on how the reduced woodland creation budget is going to be divided over next year's claim year.

Special thanks to our regional chairs, Eddie Addis (Scottish Woodlands), Simon Hart (John Clegg & Co), Neil Crookston (Scottish Woodlands) and Claire Wightman (Tree Storey). And also to my predecessor, Jamie Farquhar, who put these events and steering groups in motion during his time at Confor and who is still an enthusiastic face to be found in the audience.

The Confor regional committees and SFTT steering groups are always looking for new members so if you or a colleague are interested in joining, please get in touch. We are also keen to hear from you if you have any suggestions for venues, topics or speakers. If you wish to present at the next series of SFTT evening events, please submit a title and short blurb for your talk and this will be passed on to our steering committees.

Presentations are uploaded to the SFTT website (<https://forestryscotland.com>) after the events. If you have any questions from the spring series, please get in touch (april.armstrong@confor.org.uk).



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BUILDING UP INDUSTRY INTEREST



Technical and Industry Support Manager **Richard Hunter** rounds up the work being done by Confor to promote forestry careers and skills across the UK.

The forestry skills forum (FSF) is made up of a main group with four subgroups that actively work to further specific skills agendas in England and Wales.

Confor chairs the 'attracting and retaining' subgroup, which this year has actioned two main projects: first, a webinar to sign up new forestry STEM ambassadors, and second to attend careers fairs for military leavers.

The group also has plans for a school survey to better understand the perception of forestry to children.

Careers fairs

The first military-leaver career fair of the year was a great success. Held in Salford, conversations were varied across forest management, deer control and FMO, as well as research and certification management. Taking on feedback from last year's events, the stands at each fair were staffed with at least one ex-service forestry worker.

At these events, we are selling the idea of a forestry career. Confor members are welcome to send details of suitable job vacancies that can be advertised on the day. Please contact Richard Hunter (richard.hunter@confor.org.uk) for more information.

Confor has now signed the Armed Forces Covenant. This is to show our support for the armed forces and commitment to aiding their transition to civilian life.

The STEM ambassador network has

been discussed several times in the past but continues to build momentum both in terms of numbers and resources. A recent webinar / workshop hosted and run by STEM Scotland with support from Lantra and Confor encouraged over 20 more foresters to sign up to the network.

The next step for this project is to create a resource hub from which forestry ambassadors can quickly and easily find online materials to support their activities in schools. There are also discussions about how the forestry STEM network can share physical resources.

Further work in England

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee recently requested that a FSF representative attend an in-person meeting. Ros Burnley attended on behalf of the Forum and gave evidence highlighting the inadequacy of the T-levels, as well as stressing the impact of planting targets if there is no full-time pathway for forestry education.

Additionally, the Forestry Commission has brought together a working group, led by the FSF Trailblazer Group, to write a Higher Technical Qualification for Forest Works Managers (FWMs). This will be a IFATE approved qualification which, when approved, should be eligible for Government funding.

To ensure the content is suitable for the range of different forestry organisations that use FWMs, the Trailblazer Group

are holding a series of face-to-face consultation events to introduce the draft occupational standard. To find out more about this development and shape the content please sign up to attend an event here: <https://forms.office.com/e/RUyLff4z4y>.

- 9 May 2024, Birches Valley Training Centre, Forestry Commission, Cannock Chase.
- 14 May 2024, University of Cumbria, Fusehill Street Campus, Carlisle.
- 17 May 2024, Lantra, Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells.

Plans for Scotland

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and UHI Inverness are the two forestry education providers in Scotland. Last year they met with senior managers from a range of forestry organisations to discuss the critical issue of falling student numbers.

This was reported at the time and since then both SURC and UHI have worked up a series of measures that it is hoped the industry will support. These plans will be discussed at the next meeting, scheduled for May, and are expected to include new courses and changes to the existing course models.

What comes next

Forestry Training Service UK is currently being incorporated as a full company. This is being undertaken by Confor staff. The next phase will be collecting industry funds in order to employ a full-time person to drive this important project forward.



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ENGAGEMENT AT ALL LEVELS

As the first run of Confor’s Stakeholder Engagement Training (Scotland) nears its end, we hear from the trainers and trainees on how the learning has enhanced skillsets.

Developed in partnership between Confor and Aigas Associates, the training was conceived with input from a wide breadth of industry representatives to ensure the content and takeaways had true value for sector professionals.

With funding support from Scottish Forestry, the Stakeholder Engagement Training (Scotland) programme aims to provide the tools and guidance required to mitigate 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.

The development and launch of this training were regarded enthusiastically by Cabinet Secretary Mairi Gougeon. She said: “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.”

In addition to an in-person workshop, each delegate is offered the opportunity to join an online Q&A with a panel of typical planting scheme stakeholders from outwith the industry, and is also granted access to a hub of resources offering best practice guidance and examples.

The first training sessions took place in Inverness, since hosting cohorts in Oban, Inverurie, Perth and Newton St Boswells.

Amanda Bryan MICFor, Director of Aigas Associates, said: “It is really positive to see so many forestry companies and forest managers embrace the stakeholder engagement training that has been developed by the sector for the sector.

“Each session has involved active sharing of experience and learning from each



other with the overall objective of ensuring engagement is more effective and targeted and improving all aspects of forest management. Claire Glaister [co-trainer] and I have really enjoyed delivering the training and hearing the buzz of discussion as participants work through their own projects using the framework that has been developed.”

Stephen Garbett, Project Manager (Woodland) at Scottish Water, attended one of the training days in Perth. He spoke to us about the impact of the course on his role.

Even though I’ve been working in forestry for around five years now, I was stepping into a role where I was anticipating undertaking stakeholder engagement at a level I haven’t really had to carry out before. I’ve sort of been involved with members of the public in various forms, as most foresters are, but I hadn’t actually conducted it myself.

When I saw the course and why it was being done, it very much raised my awareness of that skills gap. I wanted to be well-trained and well-informed, and it was just

opportune timing with my new role.

I thought the whole structure was very helpful and well thought through. There’s an online session beforehand which gives you a flavour of everything. And then the resource hub is actually really useful in general. It’s well put together and there’s a lot of information I hadn’t heard of before.

I didn’t realise there are a lot of guidance and policy documents which are relevant. Having that hub, especially all in one place, is an excellent resource and something I have already gone back to in my day job to reference and look upon.

The workshop day itself was also incredibly useful. You’re learning from others in the room and the trainers did a very good job of sharing things that had come up in previous sessions. You could tell it was very dynamic and well run. It is probably only going to go from strength to strength if it’s continued.

My most valuable takeaway would probably be about the proportionality of stakeholder engagement. Even though there’s not really a clear answer to what is proportional in every scenario, it’s subjective, it still helped to be given the parameters so you can answer that question yourself. How do we deliver proportional stakeholder engagement for the particular project we’re working on?

The sort of catch-all key thing was to have an awareness of what’s required and what resources are available. Plus, seeing what other people’s experiences are. I think will all help me in the future.

It was excellent, it gave me everything I felt like was required and I feel more confident now in my role.

The final scheduled training days of this programme will take place at SRUC Barony, Dumfries, on 29-31 May. Places on the course are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Registration is still open at www.confor.org.uk/resources/events.

Confor and Aigas Associates are in the process of reviewing further dates later in 2024, dependant on interest.



A FIRST STEP INTO A CAREER IN FORESTRY

Helen McKay, Chief Forester for Scotland at Scottish Forestry, explains how a pre-apprenticeship scheme benefits the sector.

I think we all agree that the sector needs more skilled experienced foresters, be they machine operators, site supervisors, planners or woodland officers. Even with the budget cuts in Scotland, we have a vast area of existing forests to manage and monitor.

While there are several encouraging initiatives underway, the Forestry Pre-apprenticeship gives youngsters (16 to 21 years old) a way of experiencing the real world of forestry work. Hopefully this will then encourage them into a life-long career in our sector. It is a relatively easy first step for young people and an ideal format for the hosting business.

We have been adapting the very successful Land-based Pre-apprenticeship into one designed for forestry. A six-month pilot trial has so far worked well.

RTS Forestry, who mentored a forestry pre-apprentice in 2023, shared their experience of the programme: "Ryan joined us via the Forestry pre-apprenticeship initiative in September 2023. He arrived ready to work thanks to the pre-start training that was provided.

"It's encouraging to see individuals like Ryan who are eager to learn and contribute positively from the outset. Offering him a full-time position as a Trainee Forest Craftsperson demonstrates both his capabilities and the company's commitment to nurturing talent within the forestry sector.

"RTS Forestry recognises the importance of developing the next generation of forestry operatives. By providing Ryan with additional training and opportunities



for growth, the company is not only investing in his future but also ensuring a skilled workforce for the industry as a whole. We look forward to continuing to support Ryan as he develops his skills and experience to reach his full potential"

The great news is that we've been told that funding has been allocated for up to 10 places in 2024/25. Given the geographical challenge of matching trainees to mentor businesses, this year we're trying to find suitable hosts first and then target local schools in the spring.

Do you have the capacity and willingness to help someone take their first step into forestry?

All the administration, including organising the initial training through SRUC, is handled by Ringlink Scotland, with funding administered by Skills Development Scotland.

The mentor business will have a chance to interview the pre-apprentice to make sure that he/she is suitable and must pay at least minimum agricultural wage rates for the trainee over the six-month placement.

The programme will:

- Let young people in the local area get their start in rural land-based work.
- Fund a training package worth approx. £1,500. This is tailored to forestry and is given to each candidate during a residential induction week, followed by bespoke short course training during the work placement.
- Provide support for the mentors and pre-apprentices from an experienced team dealing with employing young people.

The main details are here: www.ringlinkscotland.co.uk/preapprenticeship. For further information or questions please contact Gail Robertson at Ringlink Scotland (gail@ringlinkscotland.co.uk).



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PLANTING THE SEEDS OF THE FUTURE WITH KOMATSU FOREST

Carlisle Skills Fair is an annual event, hosted by John Stevenson MP. Held at the local college, it's a great opportunity for young people to find out about opportunities that businesses and training providers can offer.

Komatsu Forest attended this January with the goal of highlighting the Forestry industry as a viable opportunity for young people in the area. Their ever-popular harvester simulator machine was the star of the show (even the MP tried his hand at it!). Normally used for training purposes, the simulator has proven to be very popular with young people at similar events. Picking up logs with a grapple and carefully stacking them on a forwarder using joystick controls is more challenging than it looks, but students definitely seem to have the advantage over the adults on this!

Along with information on the lifecycle of forests and sustainability, Komatsu also highlighted the variety of career paths that exist within the industry. The team were out in full force and spoke to a great many young people and their parents. Most had not considered the Forestry industry previously but were intrigued to find out more.

Stephen Bellas, Komatsu Forest Managing Director, said: "We were thrilled to meet so many talented and ambitious young people as they find out more about a career path that suits them and their interests."

In 2023, Komatsu Forest teamed up with Carlisle United Community Sports Trust to set up the Climate Heroes program. The aim of the program was to supply local schools with climate change and

sustainability-focused lessons. Designed to fit in with year 5 and year 6 curriculum, the program would be an invaluable tool for schools, whilst also providing myth-busting knowledge of the Forestry industry to the students and teachers alike.

After a lot of planning and hard work had gone into the program itself, a pilot was launched with Crosby-on-Eden School in Cumbria. It was a fantastic success and led the way for the program to launch. An informal showcase presented to a panel of teachers and head teachers in the area led to many schools signing up.

The program itself consists of the delivery of a six-week lesson plan to local schools on climate change and sustainability. The lessons include the topic of climate change, what it is and why it happens and how it affects us; along with how we can fight it, with interactive games and suggestions for "what can I do at home" to help.

Peatlands and other habitats are also covered, including endangered species and threats to their survival. The culmination of the program for students and teachers is a visit to the brand-new Komatsu Forest facility near Carlisle in Cumbria. For this final lesson, pupils spend the day at Komatsu finding out what it's like to be in the forestry industry.

A fun-filled day, students start off with an introductory video to forestry, and why it's so important to life today, as well as information on Komatsu and the machines we provide, alongside receiving a safety briefing and their PPE. Next the class is split into small teams of students to take part in the activities.

An engineering task sees the students working as a team to put together a cog assembly. Memory, problem-solving and logic are all put to the test in this challenge. The second activity is a tour of the Komatsu facility including the workshop area where the students get to sit in a machine and experience the controls, followed by an observational skills worksheet.

The third activity is a simulator experience, where students try their hand at operating a forwarder or harvester, carefully picking up logs with a grapple and stacking them for forwarding – always a big hit with students (and adults).

Various schools in the county have already been involved, to great success, with many more planned to enrol in the program this year and into 2025.

Stephen Bellas, Managing Director at Komatsu Forest commenting on the partnership with the Carlisle United Community Sport Trust, said: "The six-lesson plan focuses on various aspects of sustainability, such as forestry, carbon footprints, ecosystems, biodiversity, and promoting a greener future. We have been delighted to see the children show great enthusiasm and incredible knowledge about their environment, and we plan to continue the 'Climate Heroes' project into next year."

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FORESTRY SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMME DRAWS TO A SUCCESSFUL CLOSE

A highly popular forestry skills programme, providing important qualifications in chainsaw operating, tractor driving, tree planting and much more for trainees in Scotland and Wales, has drawn to a successful close for the 2023 cohort.

Launched in 2022, the Foresight Sustainable Forestry Skills Training Programme is a joint venture between Foresight Sustainable Forestry Company Plc, the UK's first listed natural capital investment company, and Tilhill. It initially aimed to help young people in rural Wales gain employment opportunities in forestry by providing training, health and safety equipment and mentoring.

Due to its success, the programme was extended into Scotland for the latest candidate intake, in partnership with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).

The UK is experiencing a critical forestry skills shortage as it strives to meet tree planting targets to combat climate change and meet the increasing demand for home-grown timber. In 2023, approximately 80% of all timber used in the UK was imported, highlighting a clear need to upskill and expand the forestry contractor workforce.

Over 70 applicants came forward for the 2023 programme and the 10 selected candidates have now completed their fully funded training at Coleg Cambria, Llysfasi and at SRUC Barony Campus, Dumfries.

Andy White, Lead Forestry Lecturer at Coleg Cambria Llysfasi, said: "The Foresight Sustainable Forestry Skills Training Programme is a fantastic opportunity for

young people looking for a start in the forestry industry. This year's successful students have been lucky enough to receive training and qualifications in a wide range of practical forestry skills including tree felling and chainsaw use, first aid, strimmer, brushcutter and clearing saw use, tractor driving and operation, and pesticide application.

"New blood is in short supply within forestry, so this program is particularly welcome by encouraging new entrants, and providing the basics they need to get started. The generosity of Foresight in funding these courses, and providing all the necessary PPE, demonstrates their commitment to 'growing their own' new generation of foresters of the future."

The trainees, Ynyr Roberts, Brychan Edwards, Rhys Ap Gwyndaf, and Bedwyr Roberts from Wales, as well as Anna French, James Findlay, Sean Hain, Connor Glover, Jock Munro, and Francesca Roberts from Scotland, come from diverse backgrounds across their respective regions.

Sean commented: "I felt very grateful to be a part of the Foresight Sustainable Forestry programme and had a great time learning about the various roles that contribute to the forestry industry as a whole. The intensive nature of the course provided a full-on learning experience which, although difficult at times, was very rewarding when you look back at the achievements at the end of the month.

"The investment into myself as an individual was an honour and further motivated

me to commit 100% to the process."

Tilhill has since employed the Wales candidates as contractors to carry out planting works in its woodland creation sites. Additionally, one of the Scottish programme candidates is now undertaking a pre-apprenticeship programme with Forestry & Land Scotland.

David Edwards, Tilhill's Forestry Director said: "It brings great pleasure to be able to welcome ten newly qualified people into the forest industry in Scotland and Wales as a result the fully funded Foresight Sustainable Forestry Skills Training Programme.

"The next step is for some of the trainees to receive mentoring from Tilhill Forest Managers, people with experience across full timber crop rotations including tree planting, woodland management and the harvesting and restocking of the best quality trees for home grown timber to supply local markets. This is especially important as the UK seeks to replace carbon-emitting steel and concrete in construction with home grown timber from sustainably managed forests."

"These individuals' newly acquired skills will no doubt be in high demand, in an industry where there is a national skilled workforce shortage," added Richard Kelly, Co-Lead of Foresight Sustainable Forestry Company. "The success of this year's programme highlights the value of investing in the next generation of forestry professionals, empowering local communities to contribute to the twin fights against climate change and biodiversity loss."

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WEATHERING THE STORM FOR SEVEN GENERATIONS

As vocal opposers to the budget cuts facing forestry in Scotland, Christies (Fochabers) Ltd has been a frequent feature of the news pages of late. **David Lee** paid them a visit to find out more about the business and the legacy that's under threat.

As family businesses go, Christies (Fochabers) Ltd has been there, done that and got the Tree-Shirt.

The company has been growing trees in Morayshire since 1820, when Thomas Christie founded the firm after leasing land from the Duke of Gordon.

Thomas's great-great grandson Ronald Christie was the fifth generation when he started work with the firm, aged 16 in 1970. He went on to serve as Managing Director and is now Chairman. His son Neal is the current MD and grandsons Alfie and Bradley have since joined what is now a jaw-dropping seven-generation family business.

Christies grows a variety of species across five sites and, at peak times, has up to 130 million trees of different species and sizes, with an annual production of around 22 million.

But as Ronald has described in recent media interviews, it faces the "biggest threat to its business in a generation" - after the Scottish Government announced that funding for woodland creation was being cut from £77.2m to £45.4m, a 41% cut for planting season 2024/25.

This funding would only cover 9,000 hectares of new woodland in 2024/25, creating a huge problem all along the supply chain and especially for Christies and other tree nurseries who supply trees for planting.

"We grow young trees based on Government policy and funding, and plan three years ahead, so seed was sown in Spring 2021 for planting season 2024/2025," Ronald said. "The budget cut means we'll reach a point where we have to destroy millions of young trees unless the Scottish Government reinstates the funding - which pays for tree planting by farmers and landowners,

working with forestry companies."

The longevity of the Christies business means destroying trees - and serious threats to the business - are nothing new.

This is made clear in J M MacKay's book, *A History of Christies Nurseries, Fochabers, Moray - Forest Tree Specialists*, published in 1991 when the company was a mere 171 years old.

It recalls that a combination of the 1926 General Strike and global financial crash of 1929 led to stocks of saleable trees building up and many having to be burned.

More recently, the UK Government's introduction of Capital Transfer Tax in 1975 had a similar impact. As MacKay wrote: "The effect was Tax had to be paid on planting interests instead of when felling took place. Consequently, the Company's market dropped. Two million trees had to be burnt because it was unable to find a buyer."





Even more trees (around five million) were burned after the change in tax status in the infamous 1988 Nigel Lawson Budget.

The first 'burning', in the 1920s, came between two world wars, which also threw up enormous challenges for the business, with labour shortages, depressed markets and general uncertainty about what the future would look like.

Fortunately, all of Christies leaders showed what MacKay describes as "stability, perseverance and foresight" in weathering such regular threats - and constantly diversifying the business.

This included opening florists and fruit shops across Moray, creating the garden centre at Fochabers and running hotels and a caravan park. Large greenhouses have been added since the 1920s, to ensure plants, flowers, bulbs, fruit and vegetables could be grown to sustain the business, alongside the trees.

However, growing trees has remained a cornerstone of Christies since it was founded in 1820 - as the country settled into a period of peace after the Napoleonic Wars were over and the Duke of Gordon agreed to lease land to Thomas.

As J M MacKay writes: "It is very doubtful, even in his initial bout of euphoria, that he could have visualised the Nursery [by 1991] would have exceeded its original boundaries by some 200 Hectares and producing 20,000,000 Forest Trees each season."

The "perseverance and foresight" passed down the generations and Thomas's son William, who took over the business in his early 20s, made trips to the United States and returned with seeds for species including Sitka spruce.

Like all the generations before them, the current management team needs healthy



markets to sustain the business, which is a mainstay of local employment in Moray.

Christies now has almost 60 staff (80 at peak times in March and April) and has invested heavily in people and equipment - £3 million in the last five years alone, on cold stores, lifting machines, better facilities for workers and much more.

"We wouldn't have signed off on that kind of expenditure if we thought funding for planting would be cut," said Ronald. "And if funding isn't there to support the levels of planting we planned for, we'll have far too many young trees. The market will not be there to sell them.

"For a while, we can move things around, but ultimately, we'll have to destroy millions of trees - unless things change.

"And if they don't change, we won't sow as many tree seeds for the future. It's too big a risk if current policy suggests they won't be needed.

"It's taken away the confidence and cer-

tainty we need to plan ahead. It reminds me of the late 1980s when forestry's tax status was changed and it took us ten years to fully recover. We ended up burning about five million young trees then; such a terrible waste, which we don't want to see again."

Ronald says there are tough decisions ahead for the business, especially for Neal as Managing Director, and Alfie and Bradley beyond. Like Neal and Ronald before them, the boys started at the bottom - driving tractors and doing all the manual tasks around the place.

They have come into a complex business, with five sites: Fochabers; Castlehill Farm, to the west; Tulloch Farm, near Mill of Tynet; Broadley Farm; and Arradoul, on the way to Buckie.

"We grow at all five sites and all our trees are planted in Scotland," says Ronald. "We supply Forestry & Land Scotland, larger private companies like Scottish Woodlands and Highfield, and independent operators like McConnachie Land and Forestry Services in Elgin.

"We work with everybody and we're part of a long chain - those who plant the trees, manage and nurture them, harvest them, transport them and make wood products from them. Less money for planting means fewer trees will go into the ground and everyone loses out.

"All I want is for the Scottish Government to think again and reverse the cuts; for all those people working in our industry across Scotland.

"I love my job - I'm still working at 70 - and I'm proud of what we have built at Christies. I'd like to see Alfie and Bradley - and then their children - take over the business and keep it thriving, maybe for another seven generations!"

RGU RESEARCH SUPPORTS THE EXPANSION OF TREESCAPES IN THE UK

Researchers at Robert Gordon University (RGU) are contributing to a new study to find out how we can expand the UK's trees, hedgerows, woodlands and forests in rural and urban settings.

Forests and other treescapes account for more than 13% of the UK's land surface and capture approximately 21 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. This is an important contribution to the UK's goal of reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

In order to meet the UK's ambitious tree planting targets and simultaneously reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, current agricultural land will need to be converted into alternative land-uses.

The UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) body has commissioned research to improve our understanding of treescapes in the UK, their value to people and the planet, and has committed £14.5 million in funding to support the studies.

RGU is collaborating with partners at

Newcastle University, Southampton University and Reading University, as part of the Future of UK Treescapes Programme, to find out about the attitudes of society to UK forests.

Researchers want to find out what society wants from UK forests in the future and whether we can adapt our trees and forests to tackle climate change. They will also assess the impact of agroforestry on ecosystems and how best to engage farmers and other stakeholders in the process.

The team from RGU want to make the current scientific research on agroforestry more accessible to a diverse range of people and is collaborating with artists and the Museum of English & Rural Life (MERL) to create visual and multimedia materials to 'translate' or transform scientific data.



Lost Song, Naomi McIntosh

FOREST AND PEATLAND SCHEME SOWS SEED FOR NET ZERO

Photo credit: Julie Howden



(Ltr) Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability; Grant Ferguson, Director of Estates Net Zero; Yvonne Edwards, Forest Peat and Rural Land Manager; and Annie Yang, Academic Manager, Social Responsibility and Sustainability.

Work to plant woodland and restore peatlands in Scotland has begun as part of a project to capture the University of Edinburgh's carbon emissions.

The scheme - thought to be the biggest of its kind undertaken by a UK university - will offset any carbon emissions that can't be reduced to zero.

The University will work with partners across Scotland to plant an estimated 2 million trees and restore at least 855 hectares of peatlands, the size of more than 1,200 football pitches.

A 431-hectare site overlooking the Ochil Hills in Stirlingshire and 26 hectares at Rullion Green in the Pentland Hills Regional Park near Edinburgh are the first of several sites that will be regenerated.



One artist is producing creative material to visualise ecological models around heat mapping and the impact of forests on animal welfare, whilst other participatory workshops are exploring sensory methods, and transforming the electrical signals of plants to sounds.

Dr Jennifer Clarke, anthropologist, artist, and Associate Professor in Critical and Contextual Studies at Gray's School of Art, is leading RGU's part of the study and is holding participatory workshops to engage the public.

She said: "Agroforestry, where trees are deliberately combined with agriculture on the same piece of land, is an important form of land use that can maintain food production whilst driving down carbon emissions.

"In order to fully understand society's attitudes to UK forests, we need to engage as wide a group of the public as possible, including farmers, landowners, and more marginalised groups in society including low-income groups, ethnic minorities and young people.

"We are collaborating with artists to create artistic works that transform the scientific knowledge into more imaginative forms. Art works and participatory practices are being developed to engage and foster discussion about treescapes in the UK at a series of workshops with different groups. The information gathered will be used to enhance future decision-making by stakeholders, including farmers and

land managers and to identify opportunities to increase agroforestry.

"Our experimental research and public engagement prioritise equality, diversity and inclusivity, which underpins Robert Gordon University's mission to lead innovative and interdisciplinary research that fosters economic and social regeneration and creates a more sustainable future for all."

A number of artists are involved in the project including interdisciplinary artist Naomi McIntosh, who is based in the Cairngorms National Park in Scotland. Naomi previously produced a project called 'Lost Song' which visually captured the data of bird song. She will use similar techniques to create engaging content to generate discussion about the UK's treescapes.

Artist Simone Kenyon and Dr Jen Clarke are holding a series of sensory mapping and creative workshops with the Youth Panel at the MERL to engage young people in about the UK's treescapes.

More workshops are planned for 2024 and the culmination of the research will include public exhibitions showcased at The MERL in Reading in 2024, and The Sill in the Northumberland National Park in 2025, an associated book publication, and an online archive to make agroforestry futures accessible for all.

The research findings will be also presented at national and international conferences, bridging arts, humanities, and science.

Over the next 50 years, the project is expected to remove 1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, equivalent to more than 9 million car journeys between Edinburgh and London.

The multimillion-pound project is a key component to the University's drive to reach net zero by 2040, which includes a commitment to reduce carbon emissions to zero across its operations.

Emissions generated from flying, which can't currently be reduced to zero, will instead be offset using the restored sites.

Enhancing biodiversity

As well as removing and storing carbon from the atmosphere, the planted woodlands and restored peatlands will also play a crucial role in enhancing biodiversity, experts say.

The project team - which includes foresters and ecologists - have worked with consultants to design woodland and habitats to fit with local landscapes. Open areas will also be maintained to support the existing wildlife.

The improved habitats will encourage more native species such as birds, red squirrels, butterflies and moths.

"The global climate emergency and biodiversity loss go hand in hand," explained Yvonne Edwards, Forest Peat and Rural

Land Manager at University of Edinburgh. "Creating woodlands and restoring peatlands is a fantastic nature-based solution that will help us achieve our own environmental goals and, at the same time, allow us to play an active role in restoring Scotland's landscape and help make it more resilient for future generations."

Positive benefits

Both locations will remain accessible to the public. Existing picnic spots and outdoor recreational spaces for walking and cycling will be maintained and new ones developed.

Surveys have also identified historical features, including part of the historic battleground of the 1666 Battle of Rullion Green - part of the Covenanter revolt against the government - at the Pentland Hills site. The University will conserve these areas and plans to install information points for visitors.

There are also plans to launch community driven initiatives, such as helping to plant endangered wildflowers, to encourage people to connect with nature.

Project leaders hope the sites will serve as a valuable educational resource for University researchers and students, as well as visitors and schools in the local communities.

Professor Sir Peter Mathieson, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, said: "We recognise the urgency of taking action to address the climate crisis, and this project underpins our commitment to take clear and tangible steps towards net-zero.

"This approach means our actions go beyond storing carbon; these valuable green spaces will become havens for nature and create spaces that everyone in our community can continue to enjoy."

Environmental ambitions

The University has ambitious targets to address climate change. Since 2021 it has completely divested from fossil fuels, introduced a sustainable travel policy and invested in programmes to improve the energy efficiency of its estate.

In the past five years more than £60 million has been invested in low carbon and renewable energy technologies, and £74 million of research funding has been secured towards sustainability and climate change research.

The University is currently ranked 15th in the world for sustainability by the QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2024, reflecting the actions it has taken to become more environmentally and socially responsible.

£20M AVAILABLE AS AUCTION FOR WOODLAND CARBON GUARANTEE ANNOUNCED

Farmers, foresters and other land managers are being encouraged to apply for scheme ahead of its eighth auction process.

Administered by the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Carbon Guarantee is a £50 million scheme that aims to help accelerate woodland planting rates and remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. It has already resulted in nearly 3,000 hectares of new woodland across the country.

£20 million has now been made available as part of the scheme's eighth auction, which will take place online from 23-29 September. The funding will provide farmers and land managers to create new woodlands to help tackle the effects of climate change, providing new income in the form of long-term payments for the amount of carbon a new woodland will store.

Following the online auction process, successful bidders will be offered the option to sell woodland carbon in the form of Woodland Carbon Units – a financial value given to each tonne of carbon stored – to the Government up to 2055 at a guaranteed price protected against inflation.

The scheme reflects the Government's

confidence in the continued growth of markets for woodland carbon, as landowners will continue to benefit from a reliable revenue stream in selling carbon on the domestic market.

For the first time, the auction will be opened up to farmers, foresters and land managers whose projects are not currently in receipt of Government funding to allow an even greater number of woodlands to benefit from the auction. These projects will have access to a higher, undisclosed reserve price per Woodland Carbon Unit.

Projects can still receive the Woodland Creation Planning Grant to support the design process and remain eligible for this new category.

Richard Stanford, Chief Executive of the Forestry Commission, said: "The Woodland Carbon Guarantee continues to be a huge success, providing additional financial surety for nearly 3,000 hectares of new woodland across the country, helping to address some of society's biggest challenges including climate change and biodiversity loss.

"The eighth auction is a great opportunity for even more farmers, foresters and land managers to reap the benefits of this scheme by receiving a guarantee of future additional income for increasing tree cover across the country and I encourage as many as possible to apply by 6 September."

Before applying for the Guarantee, land managers will need to have registered with the Woodland Carbon Code, which provides the tools and information required to verify and record the carbon they are capturing and can sell in future.

Previous auctions have seen a considerable number of contracts offered by the Forestry Commission to stimulate proposals for the creation of new woodland specifically to help combat climate change. The Government has stretching and challenging targets to increase tree canopy and woodland cover in England to at least 16.5% by 2050, and continues to take action to meet this with more than 15 million trees having been planted this parliament.



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EUROPEAN UNION DEFORESTATION REGULATION: WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

From as early as June this year, the timber supply chain will need to make changes to trade with the EU. **Richard Hunter**, Technical and Industry Support Manager at Confor, details the potential impact on the UK industry.

In an effort to curb deforestation and ensure products entering the EU are not linked to the loss of forest cover around the world, as of 1 January 2025 a new set of regulations will come into force that will impact those organisations and landowners whose timber is destined for the EU marketplace. This European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) replaces the current EU Timber Regulation, which is the same as United Kingdom Timber Regulation (UKTR).

Unfortunately, the 1 January deadline is not the only one to be aware of; from June 2024 timber harvested needs to have a Due Diligence Statement (DDS) number ready for importation into the EU from the January start point.

EUDR is not just aimed at forestry; it covers cocoa, coffee, soy, palm oil, cattle (beef products), and rubber, with the main intention being to stop deforestation for land conversion to agricultural use. Imports to the EU account for 10% of the global induced deforestation and that is what the new regulations are trying to tackle.

The simple intention is to be able to trace a timber product back to the land it was grown on so it can be proven the area has returned to forest – but in reality it's not that simple. The system requires that either a point file (sites under 4ha) or a polygon

file (sites over 4ha) is submitted to the EUDR portal at the time of felling, and that site is given a DDS reference number which covers the material produced there

As that material is sold up the supply chain, the DDS number moves with it. Of course, timber buyers are collecting material from numerous sites everyday so somehow the material needs to be tracked through the system. In the case of a log that is processed into carcass material and then sold to a builder's merchant, that would form a short chain. However, consider co-product buyers and their products. A single manufactured board could have co-products from several different processors that may have been stored in a yard over a number of days before being used in the creation of said board.

The same applies for pellet manufacturers; how to trace back the many sites from which the pellet material came from? How is something like sawdust traceable back to the tree and site it was grown? These are the questions that many in the industry are currently grappling with.

As a landowner you may decide that it's not worth the extra burden and therefore not register at point of felling. That means that processors will not be able to use this material for products to be exported to the EU and may have an impact on timber

prices achieved, whether that be as timber or co-product.

Recycled wood products do not fall under the scope of the regulation. A small or micro business is also exempt, but the majority of UK timber processors do not fall under this category.

Unfortunately, the current certification systems of PEFC and FSC are not recognised by EUDR as a means of evidencing compliance that the land is not deforested. Both organisations are working on additional support plans that will allow their customers to supply data to the EUDR hub, however the DDS number would still be required.

It is likely that the cost of an additional support package would be passed to the timber owner.

DDS does not replace local legal systems, so in the UK a felling licence would still be required, as would compliance with International Labour Organisation regulations and species control (CITES). The EUDR does not remove burden it only adds to it.

The EU will in 2025 be carrying out a risk assessment of every country that supplies into the bloc. If found to be a low risk, then only the DDS number is required. Should a country be placed as high risk then a risk assessment will be needed to justify the import of the material. Until the EU risk assesses the UK, we do not know where we will be placed.

A pilot project which included organisations in the UK recently concluded. The participant companies will be writing to the EU stating that the current system for uploading of data is totally inadequate and not fit for purpose – to the point that in January 2025 the EU could starve itself of some essential foods as organisations are not able to upload the data required and goods will be held at border check points.

Additionally, Confor is creating a working group of all those companies affected with a view to define a UK position. We are also speaking with other trade associations both in the timber world and reaching out to other affected industries to present a joint request for a longer transition time while the above issues are resolved.

The UK may potentially increase the UKTR to match EUDR, and Confor will be speaking with Defra about the impacts this would have.



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TREE PLANTING COURSES SUPPORTED BY TUBEX AND GREEN-TECH SHELTER DONATIONS

Greenway Training has achieved substantial success in the uptake of its tree planting courses, with the aim of providing practical training to prevent failed tree planting projects.

Partnering with leading tree shelter manufacturer Tubex and renowned distributor Green-tech, the training provider received a donation of 450 recyclable and biodegradable tree shelters for its courses.

The Lantra Tree Planting and Establishing Woodlands course was initially funded by Forestry Commission's Forestry and Arboriculture Training Fund, which enabled Greenway Training to offer free courses and expand the access to this important practical learning for new entrants to the sector and those seeking to build on existing skills.

Due to the increasing demand for properly trained and certified personnel in the forestry and arb sectors, the requirement for professional training has never been higher. Greenway's courses have therefore garnered immense popularity, with numerous companies now opting to enrol their employees alongside many others who are making career transitions into environmental sectors or simply want to learn more about tree planting.

Tubex's donation of 450 tree shelters, as part of its Grow Together Programme, combined with shelter location guidance and support has played an important role in the course - saving the company the expenses associated with acquiring the essential tree planting resources.

Charlotte Boole, Director at Greenway Training, said: "We are delighted with the overwhelming interest that our forestry courses have generated.

"Tubex tree shelters have proven to be ideal choice for our training programmes due to their durability and resilience, outperforming some of the other brands we've used in the past.

"The donation of 450 tree shelters has significantly enhanced the learning experience for our trainees, providing them with ample materials for hands-on learning, which we see as such a crucial part of our training for proper tree establishment."

"We look forward to expanding our forestry training offerings in the near future and look forward to working with Tubex and Green-tech again."

Grow Together is Tubex's charitable initiative launched in 2022, which offers a scheme where charity or community projects across the UK are able to receive a donation of tree shelters to protect their saplings. The company selects a certain number of projects yearly to receive a supply of shelters, considering the environment and type of trees being planted.



NORTHWOODS BIOCHAR EVENT SET TO WELCOME NATIONAL SPEAKERS

An event focusing on the opportunities biochar could present for land managers, is set to welcome expert speakers from London and the Midlands.

Hosted in Hexham, Northumberland, by woodland management initiative Northwoods, the 'Woodland Management and Biochar Workshop' will explore the different possibilities biochar presents, particu-



Photo credit: Black Bull

JAMES JONES & SONS LTD AUSTRALIA ARM EXPANDS INTO PALLET MANUFACTURE

Two years after the business expanded into Australia, James Jones & Sons Ltd has announced that pallet manufacturing will soon be a part of its regional operations following the acquisition of Rodpak Pty Ltd by its Australian subsidiary, Hyne Timber Pty Ltd.

Rodpak is a Melbourne based pallet and packaging manufacturer that, like the rest of the James Jones & Sons Group, prides itself on strong sustainability credentials and a commitment to producing premium quality products.

James Jones & Sons Ltd acquired a controlling stake in Mayflower Enterprises Pty Ltd in Australia, the holding company of Hyne Timber and XLam, in 2022. Last year the Group acquired a majority stake in Rocky Point Pty Ltd, Australia's leading manufacturer and supplier of premium quality products to the nursery, agriculture, home gardeners and erosion management industries.

Tom Bruce-Jones, Chairman of James Jones & Sons Ltd, commented: "We are delighted to welcome Rodpak Pty Ltd to the Group. The acquisition forms part of Hyne Timber's diversification and growth strategy and represents our first entry into the pallet sector in Australia."

Hyne Group CEO, Jim Bindon, said the acquisition is an exciting addition for the company: "Rodpak is a highly regarded



business with a long history in the manufacture of softwood timber pallets, with quality equipment and technology, and great customer relationships.

"While it will be business as usual for Rodpak's staff, suppliers and customers, being a part of the Group brings the strengths of the international connections

with James Jones and Sons Ltd, who are a leading pallet manufacturer in Europe, with 14 manufacturing sites throughout the United Kingdom.

"I am very pleased the current owner, Dean Roderick, will be staying on within the business, as he is well respected in the market and indeed internationally within the pallet sector. Dean has been known to the James Jones & Sons Pallets & Packaging Division for some years, and he is most highly regarded by them also."

Dean Roderick said the new ownership model was a welcome move to take the company forward.

"Becoming part of a national and global ownership model is a significant milestone for us as a business, for our team members, customers and suppliers and we have been pleased with the process to get to this point," he explained.

"Rodpak is a great business with strong partnerships, built over many years. With the local strength and global reach of the wider Group, I am very confident the company is moving in a great direction, and I personally look forward to working with the broader Hyne Group team."

larly how it could support land managers to bring more woods into better management and diversify income streams.

Confirmed speakers include Hamish Creber (Black Bull Biochar), Lizzy Read (True Capture), Stuart Dainton (National Forest Company), Adam Samuel (Capchar), Martin Glynn (Martin Glynn FICFor), and Neil Harrison (Reheat). Representatives from the Biochar Demonstrator, an interdisciplinary, UKRI funded programme will also attend and present.

The workshop format will host speakers in the morning with opportunities for the audience to ask questions, as well as a structured afternoon session that will allow attendees to discuss and explore biochar topics in more detail.

Northwoods Project Manager Rosanna Curtis said: "We are really looking forward to the event. Biochar piques a lot of interest, and we are excited to explore the opportunities for it to improve land quality with a range of stakeholders and experts."

The free workshop will take place at Hexham Auction Mart on 2 May. Visit the Northwoods website to register.



Photo credit: Black Bull

NEW FORESTRY & LAND SCOTLAND CEO TAKES THE REINS

Kevin Quinlan, formerly Director of Environment and Forestry (EnFor) with the Scottish Government, has taken up the role of Chief Executive of Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS), following the retirement of current CE, Simon Hodgson.

He said: "I am honoured to be given the opportunity to lead Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS). FLS is a key agency of the Scottish Government, delivering a wide range of environmental, social benefits and economic benefits for Scotland.

"As a timber supplier and mainstay of the sector, it helps to underpin our rural economy and provides significant levels of employment that helps sustain many rural businesses and communities. More broadly, FLS manages forests and land that help sequester 14% of Scotland gross emissions, restores 1,000ha of peat per annum, hosts over 1,000 species and provides amenities for 10 million visitors annually.

"I would like to thank Simon Hodgson for having steered the organisation through some difficult years and for help-



ing to ensure that FLS' acknowledged position as forestry experts and pre-eminent land managers is assured.

"I am looking forward to this move and to engaging with our stakeholders in the coming months to better understand how we can move forward together."



A fellow of Chartered Accountants Ire-

land and holding an MBA (Warwick University), Mr Quinlan has extensive experience of government and business, having served as Director of Environment & Forestry, Director for International Trade & Investment, as well as having worked for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Department in a variety of economic development roles.

Outgoing Chief Executive, Simon Hodgson, commented: "Mr Quinlan brings with him a very strong track record in environmental policy as well as economic development, and I have no doubt that his contribution in the years to come will only serve to further strengthen and enhance FLS' reputation in the national and international forestry sector.

"Although only five years old, FLS has navigated a path through some difficult times. We have managed to do this thanks to the support of Ministers and our many customers and stakeholders but principally thanks to our remarkable staff, who have all pulled together to play their part.

"Mr Quinlan is about to join an inspiring, committed and highly talented team."

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FORESTRY SECTOR TO KEEP VIGILANT OVER IPS TYPOGRAPHUS

Scottish Forestry is urging the forest industries to be their extra pair of eyes and familiarise themselves with symptoms of the eight toothed spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*).

Scottish Forestry is keen to ensure all woodland managers, landowners, processors and tree nurseries become very familiar with the symptoms caused by *Ips typographus*. The call for vigilance comes as Spring arrives and in case any beetles emerge due to the warmer temperatures.

Adult beetles seek shelter over the winter in conifer stumps, fallen trees and leaf litter, but become more active as the season changes. There are visual indicators of breeding, such as entry holes and larvae, that foresters can keep an eye out for before stand level symptoms emerge.

Stressed spruce trees, possibly from drought or other conditions, or those damaged from windblow, are the most susceptible to the eight toothed spruce bark beetle.

Cameron Macintyre, Tree Health Planning and Contingency Manager, Scottish Forestry, said: "We're surveying for *Ips typographus* and other damaging pests and diseases but the more eyes there are on the ground looking for the beetles, the quicker we can find and stop them from establishing.

"We're asking everyone to be vigilant and submit suspicious symptoms to TreeAlert. Any reports that could be *Ips*



typographus are immediately prioritised by Forest Research and sent to our tree health officers for further investigation.

"All you need to do is take photographs of the trees, the symptoms, and record the date and location of your finding."

The eight toothed spruce bark beetle is a serious pest of spruce trees, including both Norway and Sitka spruces.

Adult beetles were intercepted for the first time in Scotland in September 2023 by traps situated in woodlands surrounding the port of Grangemouth. No indication of a wider environment breeding population was found by follow-up surveys.

While Scotland's climate is not as suitable for *Ips typographus* as central Europe, which has sustained enormous timber loss-

es, our climate is similar to parts of Scandinavia where there are established populations.

Breeding populations have been found in the south-east of England and are subject to extensive eradication measures. These beetles are most likely to have arrived from cross-channel dispersal, whilst evidence gathered to date suggests the *Ips typographus* beetles found in Scotland arrived with imported material.

Traps with pheromone lures to attract beetles are deployed at ports, wood processors and in forest locations as part of the GB-wide monitoring network, run in partnership with Scottish Forestry, Forestry Commission England, National Resources Wales, Defra and Forest Research.

UPDATE ON CURRENT PERMITTED USAGE OF HYLOBIUS PESTICIDES

The new approval notice for Gazelle SG, the insecticide widely used through an off-label approval for the control of *Hylobius*, issued by the pesticide regulator within HSE for 2024 necessitates the cease of most forestry uses by July.

The only exceptions for forestry use are on container grown plants under glass or polytunnels in the forest nursery. This is largely due to the results from standard analysis techniques of the active ingredient, acetamiprid, not meeting current environmental safety standards.

A similar product, Insyst, will, however, continue to be used in oilrape, potatoes

and sugar beet.

The only other approved product for *Hylobius* control, cypermethrin-based Forester, is also predicted to be revoked in the near future, and is, in any case on the FSC Highly Restricted list, so unlikely to be permitted in certified forests.

Need to know

Gazelle: May be used for first generation protection. Last forestry use 31 July 2024. Renewal for post planting use August onwards unlikely.

Forester: Product will be available for use in the UK and FSC has agreed for use Au-

gust onwards proving an Environmental & Social Risk Assessment is made. It may be prudent to order soonest as stock levels may not support late purchases.

Chlorantraniliprole: Applications for use are being assessed by HSE/CRD with the hope that a positive outcome will result in time for late summer use.

Find out more

Confor members can contact the Chemical Helpline for advice on pesticide use. Our adviser is Colin Palmer, Rural Services (The Advisory Service for Weed & Pest Control in Forestry & Amenity).



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Reason for optimism despite economic and political headwinds

Simon Hart, John Clegg & Co's Head of Forestry in Scotland, **Hugh Williams**, Forestry Sales Agent in England and Wales, and **Harry Graham**, Forestry Sales Agent, reflect on the outlook for forestry in 2024.

Interest rates continued to rise during 2023 and timber prices remained largely flat. However, demand for good quality commercial forests remained strong as investors battled it out for the small selection of properties that came to market.

Analysis of the commercial forestry market in the latest John Clegg & Co Forest Market Review 2023 (launched in March 2024) shows that £45.5 million worth of plantations were traded in the 2023 calendar year, compared with £190 million in 2022.

Average prices remained similar to 2022 but are perhaps 10-15% off the peak which occurred in 2021/22.

Yet there are signs that brighter days lie ahead for 2024. Interest rates have stopped going up and are predicted to fall throughout the next year, domestic timber prices are hopefully on an upward trajectory and inflation is doing the opposite. This combined with an increase in construction activity and global timber demand paints a positive picture for the year ahead.

Scotland

Demand remains strong in Scotland and the prices being paid suggest reasons for optimism as we look forward. The end of 2023 saw two substantial woods, albeit with very different characteristics, sell for a significant premium above the asking price.

Peel Forest, a well located, young second rotation conifer wood in the Scottish borders, sold at some £30,000/stocked hectare with seven offers received at closing date. This was placed on the open market in late October and was completed by mid-December, suggesting well located woodlands are still in significant demand.

Fanans Forest, in Argyll & Bute, a mature conifer forest, again sold well at approximately £14,000/stocked hectare and within four months of being marketed. This does however show the stark correlation between price and location. In this market the closer to established mills, the higher the sale price.

Three mature commercial woods in Fort William totalling 137 hectares also hit the market towards the end of 2023 and are now all under offer at the guide price of some £15,000/stocked hectare.



The examples above show lower timber prices have impacted on the value of more mature woodlands where felling is imminent, especially where haulage cost is high. However, as timber prices are hopefully on an upward trend, we may start to see an increase in prices paid for mature plantations throughout 2024.

At the time of writing, there are two significant woods under offer, Glen Shira in Argyll, and Griffin Forest in Perthshire and these are expected to complete in 2024. Despite taking a long time to place under offer - with a combined guide of £160 million - the sale of these properties would reinforce that confidence is growing in the sector.

Naturally as plantation prices have fallen from their peak, so have prices paid for land suitable for afforestation. Transactions at the end of 2023 including a property in Aberdeenshire, sold by John Clegg & Co, suggest prices for a plantable hectare are in the region of £8,000-£10,000. The substantial budget cuts by the Scot-

tish Government to planting grants adds unwelcome uncertainty for those contemplating planting (there now is only enough cash to meet half of the 18,000ha annual planting target), but any impact on land price is not yet clear.

A number of headline large estate transactions bought for natural capital purposes also suggest this market is maturing, largely driven by demand for carbon.

In summary, there remains caution in the market in Scotland, however, transactions at the end of 2023 and start of 2024 suggest a brighter future. As interest rates fall and timber prices increase the hope is that confidence will continue to grow in the sector, and we can put a challenging 2023 behind us.

England and Wales

The market in England and Wales, like the season, shows signs of warming up and future growth.

continued on p48



Semi-mature broadleaved woodland at Coed Pen y Gelli in Flintshire.

continued from p47

Two smaller mixed woodlands in Wales recently attracted much interest (guided at £10,000/ha) and were sold, subject to contract, within two weeks of being placed on the market. Offered as two lots, totalling around 53 acres (21 hectares), the successful bidder bought both.

In North Wales a larger 70 acre (28 hectare) semi-mature broadleaved woodland at Coed Pen y Gelli in Flintshire has also attracted much interest, offering extensive areas of mature beech on flat ground located next to main roads - including the A55. This makes it ideal for local and regional firewood markets. The guide price of £10,100/ha reflects the condition of the wood and its leasehold status (although with 929 years remaining, does it make much difference?).

The availability of commercial conifer woodlands remains tight. This reflects wider issues around timber prices and tough, albeit with signs of improving, conditions for the processing sector. On a wider note, the 7 March deadline of the consultation from the Welsh Government on their new farm support policy was a key date. The Welsh Government had consulted upon proposals including a 10% minimum tree cover requirement for those farms who apply for public funding through the new Sustainable Farming Scheme. This has caused much controversy, with concerns and pushback regarding the science and logic that underpins the proposed threshold and the impacts on farms, farmers and rural communities.

If it goes ahead as proposed, it could be that farmers seek to purchase woodlands, that are currently outside their landholding, in order to meet the required woodland percentage across their whole holding. This could - and the emphasis is on 'could' - add a further reason for the sale and purchase of woodlands, and we consider this could have greatest impact on woods of small to medium size. As ever, the devil will be in the detail of the outcome of the consultation and the rules and regulations of any new arrangements.

It will also be interesting to see how this approach is regarded in neighbouring England. Having a regulatory 'stick' could augment the grant-based "carrots" for new woodland creation, such as, but not limited to the England Woodland Creation Offer and the enhanced woodland-based options within Countryside Stewardship. However, as 2024 is an election year, we wouldn't hold out for any substantive changes in the current approach.

A client sale that has occupied significant amounts of time is one where the woodland has an existing carbon agreement. There have been numerous issues to clarify, such as the ownership of the

carbon credits (this is clear, they have been retained by the original owner and planter who sold the woodland to our client) and who is responsible for the achievement of the carbon targets over the duration of the 100-year agreement (it is the original owner of the wood and not the current owner). The latter has only been clarified after much time/cost by the current owner with their legal advisers.

The ownership/responsibility issues in the case may not be applicable to all - but it does show the need for clarity in the agreements, as is a forensic understanding of the models that have been used and the assumptions that have been applied. Achieving Yield Class 8 oak may indeed prove to be a heroic and misplaced assumption, and a 'no thin' regime is unlikely to be favoured or followed by successors that want to actively manage their woods over the next century. There is a real risk that carbon will not be sequestered at the rate set out in the original validation.

We also await clarity on whether ecosystem payments, and this includes carbon, could/should be treated as taxable income. It was announced at the Spring Budget then a joint HM Treasury and HMRC working group would be established to look into the options. As for the outcome of the '10% debate' in Wales, this is another matter that could have a significant and long-lasting impact on the woodland market.



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If you are contemplating either a sale or a purchase of forestry in 2024, please contact us for a confidential discussion.

The 2023 Forest Market Review

Key findings include:

- 20 forests were sold during 2023, compared to a five-year-average of 54.
- 75% of the land sold was in Scotland.
- 60% of the forests sold within six months of being marketed.
- The average selling price was 104% of the asking price.



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SHOULD FORESTRY IN SCOTLAND RECEIVE PUBLIC FUNDING?

AN ACADEMIC RESPONSE



On 29 February, the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) published a report on the environmental and social impacts of public subsidies for the forestry sector in Scotland. The high-profile conclusion of the report was that “commercial conifer” planting no longer needs public subsidy.

Titled ‘Inquiry into public financial support for tree planting and forestry’, the report also concluded that the industry wasn’t producing high-value wood products and that fast-growing conifers were not the best means to lock up carbon.

Confor immediately put out a response rejecting the conclusions of the report. However, given the academic profile of the RSE, we were keen to study independent, academic responses to the report before saying anything more. On our website, we present analyses from experienced and knowledgeable University academics at Aberdeen, Bangor and Edinburgh Napier.

Their critiques raise a number of serious concerns, including significant weaknesses in the methodology underpinning the RSE report and an apparent selective use of information to present quite opposite conclusions to those presented in the quoted evidence.

Professor John Healey, Forest Sciences, Bangor University, noted: “The report appears to be based on a combination of information extracted from the submitted responses to the consultation, supported by selected findings from published literature. The methods adopted to search for and se-

lect the cited publications is very unclear.

“In only a few cases does the report quote the actual quantitative evidence provided by the cited research studies, or the important context or caveats that are attached to their findings. This creates a high risk of bias in comparison with the standards required for formal systematic review as set out by the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence.

“A specific example of the concerning use of evidence in the report concerns the issue of the benefits of different types of forest for carbon sequestration.

“A key conclusion of the report states “Commercial conifer is poorer at sequestering carbon... compared with mixed native species planting”. While the basis for this conclusion is not made clear, it does not seem to be derived from the evidence presented in chapter nine on “Carbon capture by trees”, which reports the more rapid take up of carbon by conifer production forestry species than by native broad-leaved species.”

The report’s analysis of the timber sector is particularly weak, with poorly evidenced conclusions and recommendations that do not stand up to scrutiny.

“While the RSE report takes on an enormous task, in reviewing the wide range of

factors relating to forestry and the services and benefits that it delivers, it appears to have gone into greater detail in some sections than others,” said Dr Morwenna Spear, The BioComposites Centre, Bangor University.

“In the case of the timber industry, and the storage of carbon in harvested wood products, it appears to have had access to relatively limited information, and therefore arrives at a relatively shallow understanding of the industry.”

Dr Dan Ridley-Ellis, Centre for Wood Science & Technology, Edinburgh Napier University, agreed, stating: “The best thing about the RSE’s report is that they published the respondents’ submissions.”

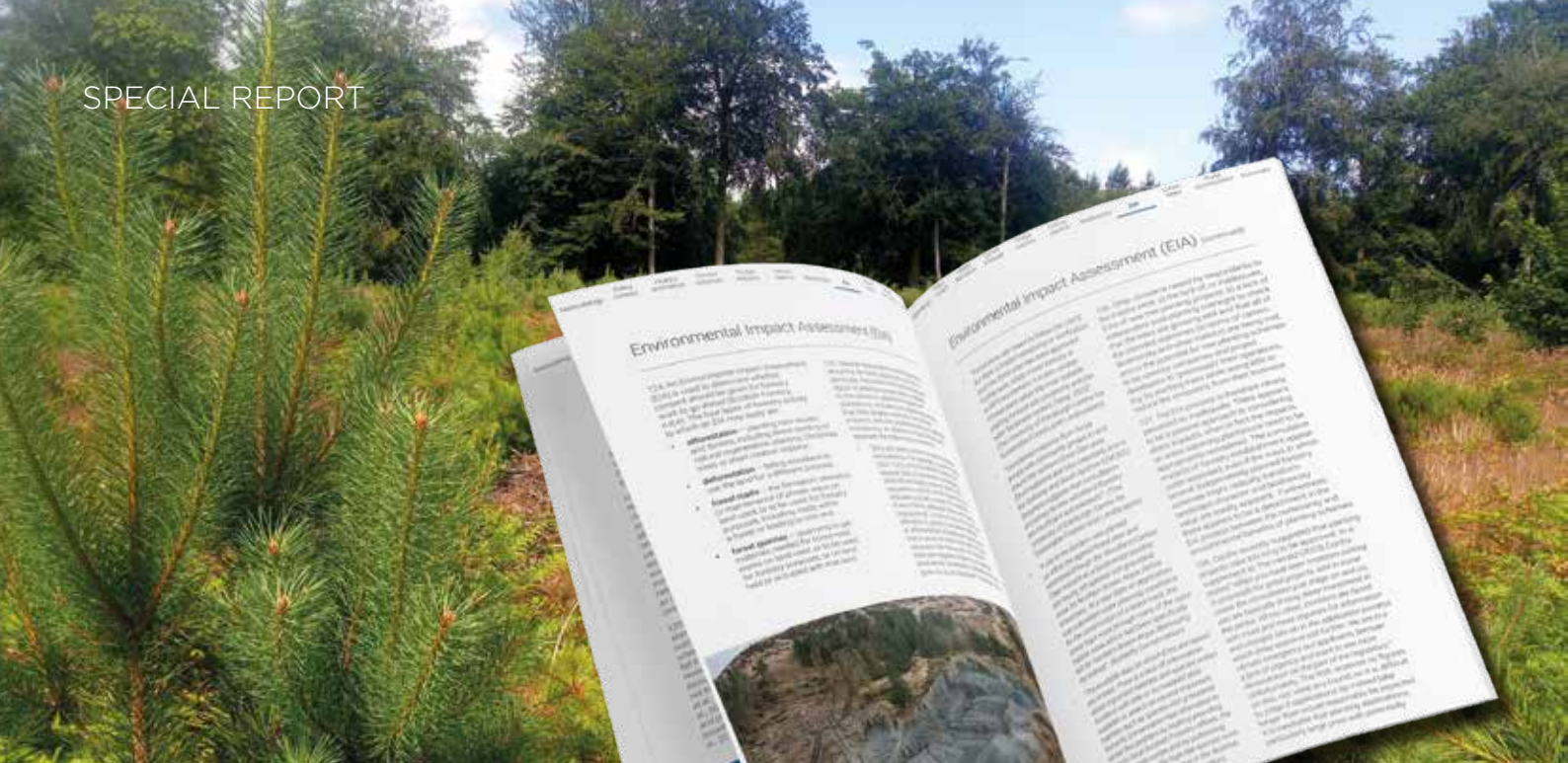
On the basis of these critiques, Confor’s Chief Executive Stuart Goodall has taken the unusual step of writing to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), copying in Scottish Government ministers.

Left unchallenged, this report could potentially damage Scotland’s important forestry sector and undermine efforts by the Scottish Government, industry, and academia to promote sustainable wood use and combat damaging climate change.

We now await with interest the response of the Chair of the SFC.

continued on p52





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The following review was shared by **Dr Andrew Cameron, Institute of Biological and Environmental Sciences, University of Aberdeen.** The full paper and citations are available on the Confor website.

The RSE report examines the use of public money by the Scottish Government for forest expansion based on the premise that the 'utility of trees extends well beyond their commercial value and these wider benefits such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity improvement, and recreation have become increasingly to the fore'.

Its main conclusion is that the Scottish Government should discontinue subsidising commercial conifer planting, stating that this has failed to deliver wider benefits to the public. The report proposes that financial support should instead focus on native broadleaved tree planting, claiming that this will provide long term carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and public benefits.

How public money is spent on forest expansion is an important and recurring issue. Evaluation of public expenditure needs to be undertaken objectively and rigorously to provide taxpayers with the information they need to determine whether public funds are spent well.

The RSE report falls short on both objectivity and rigour with particular concerns regarding the methodology and use of the literature that questions the validity of the findings in the report.

Methodology

The RSE collated information through an online survey which was open to the public and interested organisations, attracting views from 45 respondents - a small sample size in survey terms.

While open online surveys are widely used due to their low cost and relative ease of setting up, statisticians warn of the bias associated with this survey method due to the tendency of attracting individuals

critical of the subject of interest rather than those who are supportive.

By way of contrasting methodologies, Forestry and Land Scotland commissioned a survey by Censuswide on productive forest expansion (FLS, 2021) where 1,000 people in Scotland were questioned using standard statistical sampling methods. The results showed that 90% of the sampled population were in favour of expanding productive forests.

Respondents to the RSE survey provided answers to a set of 'standardised consultation questions'. No explanation is provided on how these questions were drafted or 'standardised', or whether the questions were tested to ensure clarity and impartiality.

The combination of the sampling bias and small sample size undoubtedly influenced the balance of cited material used in the report. Almost one half of the references (48%) used in the report relate to subjects associated with the climate and environmental issues, whereas only 5% specifically refer to the commercial forestry sector or timber use.

Since the central theme of the report was to examine the case for public funding of productive forestry, a comprehensive and balanced synthesis of the literature is missing.

History and context of tree planting in Scotland

The report does not state the current level of public funding for tree planting. For context, £47 million was allocated for tree planting in 2023, which accounted for less than 0.001% of the Scottish budget.

The main recommendation to end public funding of productive tree planting is stated

early in the policy section, seemingly based on selected extracts from a variety of policy documents. This suggests that the information presented in the rest of the report was not considered in making this decision.

It states that around 60% of forest holdings in other European countries are less than 1ha, whereas there are only 6% in this category in Scotland. Many Continental European forests, some originating back to post glacial times, have a long history of ownership unlike the situation in Scotland where the increase in forest cover is relatively recent.

The report implies that numerous very small forest plots under different ownerships is a good thing, but more thorough research would have shown that this pattern of ownership can lead to significant areas of forest becoming neglected since it is not cost-effective to manage such small plots.

This section goes on to highlight that most of the grant payments for tree planting go to private landowners, though fails to point out that grant payments do not, and were never intended to, cover the costs of forest establishment. The current system requires landowners to make significant financial contributions (~40-50% of costs) to tree planting schemes.

Also not mentioned is that planting grants for native broadleaves are currently 27% higher than for productive spruce.

The statement is made that most new planting in Scotland is based on non-native conifers whereas in the rest of the UK more broadleaves are planted by proportion. A silviculturist on the inquiry committee would have highlighted the basic fact that the geographic location of Scotland has affected

continued on p54

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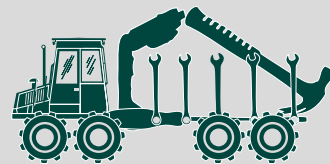
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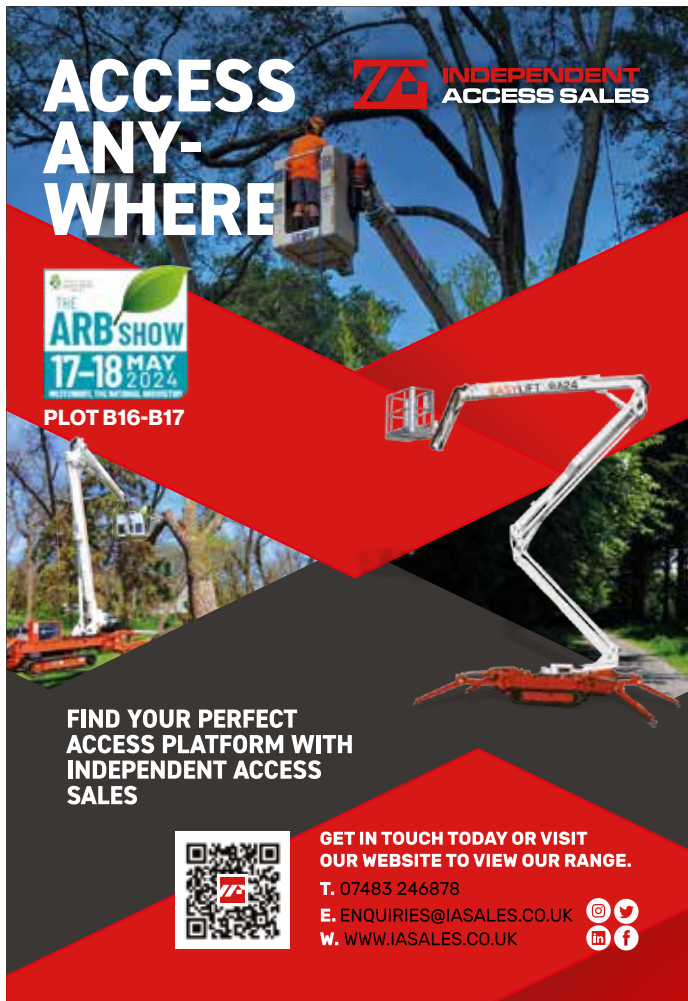
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continued from p52

a climate and site types largely unsuitable for productive broadleaved tree planting.

Current schemes and potential reform of financial support

The lack of a comprehensive synthesis of the scientific literature has led to several flawed conclusions in this section. Using a report from 1957 as an argument that a strategic reserve of timber is no longer required fails to take account of the fact that the world has radically changed since then, with population growth more than doubling and wood demand increasing accordingly.

The report also fails to adequately address the global nature of timber trade. The world is running out of industrial timber with a deficit potentially by the middle of this century raising fears that this will precipitate an expansion of logging in natural and seminatural forests, including many of the world's most threatened tropical forests.

Key environmental agencies such as the British Ecological Society, RSPB, Friends of the Earth and WWF have all recognised the role of the commercial forestry sector in reducing both demand for imported timber products, particularly from high-risk countries, and the associated environmental footprint.

A point not highlighted within the report is that productive 'plantation' forests use land efficiently - they only cover 3% of the total global forest area yet produce one third of the world's industrial timber.

There is no discussion on the environmental consequences of 'offshoring' our timber needs. The report acknowledges that poor forestry and environmental practices are prevalent in some countries and proposes a solution that 'proper control of supply chains by importers and timber industries' is needed. However, this is easier said than done.

Wood from countries actively involved in illegal logging of primary forests regularly finds its way into the international marketplace. While forest certification is widely acknowledged for its positive impacts on sustainable forest management, most of the world's certified forests are in developed countries (87% in Europe and North America) with limited uptake in developing countries making it difficult to control exploitation.

The report states that imported sources of wood products are readily available from countries with 'good environmental standards', mainly from Central and Northern Europe. What is not discussed is that the current availability of imported timber may not continue into the future through rising global demand and increasing climate-induced damage.

A combination of drought stress and insect attack has resulted in many European countries revising down their production



forecasts and that the situation is likely to become worse.

The report also does not consider the long timescales involved in growing trees for timber should a global crisis arise that affects imported supplies. Decades would be needed to build up a productive supply of timber to replace imports. Importing timber, often over great distances, comes with a significant 'carbon footprint' that is overlooked by the RSE.

There is the additional concern that in an increasingly unstable world politically, high dependence on basic resources through imports is unwise. Recent issues with gas supplies throughout Europe were a timely reminder of the vulnerability of major importing countries like the UK to global trade.

The statement suggesting that demand for planting land is pricing some farmers out of the market lacks context. Expansion of productive forests will inevitably create tensions with other land uses, particularly agriculture.

Productive tree planting tends to be located on poorer quality land, much of which has been traditionally used for upland sheep farming. The report fails to examine the contrasting economics of land use in upland areas. For example, a study in southern Scotland where the costs of maintaining hill sheep farming in Less Fa-

voured Areas (LFA) was found to require a direct payment subsidy of around 60% of output for survival, while productive forestry on the same land received a small grant contribution of around 3% of output.

Timber industry

This is the shortest section of the report, supported by only three references, which is totally inadequate to cover what is supposed to be a central topic.

The authors use a reference from a committee (Construction Leadership Forum, 2023) stating that 'timber processing in Scotland is largely restricted to short-life and low value products'.

However, based on last year's Forest Research statistics, 72% of softwood deliveries go to sawmills (60%) and panel manufactures (12%), both of which supply the higher value construction sector.

Building houses with a high content of timber is a well-established construction method in Scotland and is well ahead of the rest of the UK in timber frame designs with over 80% of new houses built using this method. Given the lifetime expectation of 50-100 years, use of timber products in house construction cannot be described as 'short-life and low value'.

There is also no mention of the research that shows that a reduction in carbon emissions by substituting timber for masonry



woodland (illuminated by a sunny woodland glade).

The report fails to examine the biodiversity associated with productive forests and the many changes to management that have taken place over the decades to better support wildlife. As with most critics of productive forestry, the report tends to look back to an era of poor environmental awareness to support their views, yet conveniently overlooks that this has long since changed.

Most of what is recommended in the report to improve biodiversity of forests is already current forest policy.

A more detailed review of the literature would have highlighted that well-implemented commercial forest management has little or no long-term environmental impact on water quality and freshwater ecology. The establishment of productive forests can also provide natural flood mitigation, a role that needs to be better recognised given the increased incidence of severe flooding.

The use of non-native species is an ongoing issue that never seems to be resolved. A key argument put forward in the report is that non-native tree species are associated with poor biodiversity. A wider examination of the literature would have highlighted numerous studies demonstrating that productive forests of non-native temperate trees sustain a level of biodiversity equivalent to that in planted forests of native species.

It is interesting to reflect on the contradiction in criticising non-native tree species growing in Scottish forests that cover 19% of the land area when almost the entire agricultural sector, covering almost 70% of the land area, is based on farming non-native plants and animals.

Using non-native species better adapted to a changing climate, and intermixing native and non-native species, is seen as an essential part of increasing forest resilience in Europe. Using a wider range of species is already part of current forest policy in Scotland, but it takes time to ensure supplies of suitably site adapted species are available from forest nurseries and to sufficiently understand the silvicultural requirements and wood properties of alternative species.

Final comments

While it is important to challenge how public money is used, it is equally important that taxpayers are provided with clear, unambiguous information based on scientifically robust studies.

The RSE report fails on this count primarily due to lack of objectivity and rigour in the methodology, and the lack of a comprehensive review of the literature. Consequently, the findings and recommendations presented are highly selective and therefore unreliable and should be treated with caution.

two harvests supported up to 269% more greenhouse gas mitigation potential than newly planted broadleaf conservation forests.

High productivity is also a significant factor in green-

house gas mitigation and is consistent with other studies indicating that expansion of the forest area using fast-growing species is the most cost-effective way to sequester carbon.

The report is correct to point out that soil carbon can be lost at planting and that it can take several years before a net carbon sink is established; however, a more detailed analysis of the role of cultivation and soil carbon over longer timeframes is missing.

An examination of the literature shows that there is a decrease in soil carbon during the first five years following afforestation, then a recovery with significant increases and net gain in carbon evident from around 30 years onwards depending on the soils. Even if relatively short rotations of say 40 or so years are used, soil carbon stocks (and a large proportion of nutrients) at harvesting are replenished if most of the residues (e.g. branches, offcuts, tree stumps) are retained on site, which is normal operational practice.

Biodiversity

The section on biodiversity is the longest in the report. The narrative is primarily based around a comparison between commercial forests/monocultures (illustrated by austere photographs of dark understoreys and linear planting) versus native broadleaved

and concrete in building construction is around 20% and 60% respectively.

Carbon capture by trees

The report only briefly covers carbon capture by trees with only five references – and these are exclusively on soils. The extensive body of literature on the role of productive forests in carbon sequestration is missing.

While the report acknowledges that fast-growing species such as Sitka spruce sequester carbon more quickly than native broadleaved species, it counters this by stating that natural forests store more carbon than plantations without supporting evidence.

There are numerous studies that show that productive forests are significantly more effective at removing and storing atmospheric carbon than environmental tree planting. In addition, productive forests will continue to deliver mitigation long into the future when environmental forests will have reached their peak capacity.

A major omission in the report is discussion around the fate of harvested wood that supports a significant part of greenhouse gas mitigation potential of productive forests. Taking account of both forest growth and use of the harvested wood, a study based on these life cycle stages over a 100-year time horizon found that newly planted productive Sitka spruce forest over

Adult predatory beetles (*Rhizophagus grandis*) and their prey, the larvae of the great spruce bark beetle.

BITING BACK AGAINST THE GREAT SPRUCE BARK BEETLE

To help combat the pest threat to spruce species in the UK, the biocontrol programme for managing *Dendroctonus micans* is seeking private sector funding. Forest Research's **Sonja Steinke**, **Molly Davidson** and **Katy Dainton** explain the importance of industry support.

The great spruce bark beetle (*Dendroctonus micans*) is an extremely successful invasive pest of spruce which, when left uncontrolled, can cause considerable economic damage. The beetle is believed to be native to Siberia but has expanded its range into large parts of Europe and western Asia, mainly through the transportation of infested timber.

In the United Kingdom, it was first discovered in Shropshire in 1982, by which time it was already well established throughout most of Wales and parts of the West Midlands (Bevan and King, 1983). Today, *D. micans* is widely distributed across England and Wales and has spread north into southern and central Scotland but is absent from the north of Scotland and the

island of Ireland.

The biology of this comparably large species differs from other bark beetles of concern. Single females, already fertilized by sibling-mating, attack a host and can start a new breeding colony on their own (Gregoire, 1988). They don't rely on pheromones to attract a mating partner or induce mass attacks, as common in other bark beetles like *Ips* species. The absence of chemical attractants means it is not possible to monitor *D. micans* using pheromone trapping.

All species of spruce are susceptible to this beetle pest, including Sitka and Norway spruce. The damage is caused by the larvae, which feed on the inner bark layers of living trees. It can take several years for healthy trees to be killed, whereas trees stressed from drought or waterlogging can

succumb much more quickly.

If infestation is detected early and control measures implemented, tree mortality rates are generally low. However, *D. micans* can be difficult to detect, especially in the early stages of infestation which allows large beetle populations to build up unnoticed.

The solution

Fortunately, the entomologists at Forest Research have an ally on their side for the control of this pest. *Rhizophagus grandis* is a predatory beetle that preys exclusively on the juvenile stages of *D. micans* – a rare trait among insect predators. Along with its extraordinary ability to locate its prey over several kilometres, this makes *R. grandis* the perfect biological control agent.

Forest Research has run a breed and re-

lease programme since the 1980s, based at the Northern Research Station (NRS) near Edinburgh since 2017. About 2,500 predators are bred each year in the NRS entomology lab and then released in infested spruce stands across the UK to diminish *D. micans* populations, slow its spread, and reduce tree mortality.

The program is of particular importance for the protection of regions still free of *D. micans*, including the 'Pest Free Area' (PFA) in West Scotland. The PFA permits timber trade exports to Ireland, which has EU protected zone status for this and other beetle pests.

As the PFA has remained *D. micans* free, roughly 200,000 tonnes of roundwood are exported from Scotland to the island of Ireland per year (Scottish Forestry, 2023).

Programme funding

The annual cost of the *R. grandis* breed and release programme is ca. £40,000. This is funded by Scottish Forestry, Forestry and Land Scotland, Forestry England, and Confor, the latter contributing £10,000 per annum.

The overall *D. micans* surveillance programme, including aerial surveys, costs significantly more (over £200,000) and is funded by Scottish Forestry and Forestry England.

Support from Confor members is greatly appreciated and without this annual contribution it might not be possible to continue releasing *R. grandis* on private sites in the future. If you or your organisation would like to contribute to the programme you can donate on the dedicated GoFundMe page (<https://gofund.me/f5b->

[da537](https://gofund.me/f5b-da537)) or contact Richard Hunter directly (richard.hunter@confor.org.uk).

Reporting pests and diseases

Woodland managers who suspect an outbreak of *D. micans* should report this through our TreeAlert reporting tool or contact the NRS Entomology team for advice on managing this pest. Once reported, the entomology team at NRS will assess eligibility for the biocontrol programme and arrange treatment if necessary.

TreeAlert is a system for reporting suspected tree pests and diseases of concern in Britain. Reporting a pest or disease early can help trigger corresponding management measures and contributes to wider surveillance for species of forestry concern, as well as other native insects. It is also available to members of the public, such as forest visitors, who suspect they have seen evidence of tree pests or diseases in Great Britain (suspected sightings in Northern Ireland should be reported using TreeCheck, the all-Ireland tree pest reporting tool.)

The system can be accessed at: <https://treealert.forestresearch.gov.uk/>

The following information is essential for reporting via TreeAlert:

- Details of the location of the tree or trees of concern, such as a grid reference or postcode. Alternatively, you can identify the location on a map within TreeAlert.
- The capacity to upload three digital photographs, including one of the affected tree(s) in context, one of the symptoms in context, and one of the symptoms in detail.

Entomology at NRS

As well as delivering the *Rhizophagus grandis* breeding programme, the entomologists at NRS work on a wide range of research topics. Examples include the development of insect monitoring systems, alternative biocontrol strategies (as for the large pine weevil *Hylobius abietis* for example), or population genomics to characterise the population structure of the oak processionary moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*).

The team also holds a reference collection of forest insects, supports FR's Tree Health Diagnostic and Advisory Service, and provide specialist knowledge on pests and other insects associated with trees.

The Tree Health group has received extensive investment across Forest Research, which allowed for the upgrading of the Entomology lab facilities in 2021, improving the provision of diagnostics, maintenance of several laboratory insect cultures, and an external temperature-controlled research unit.

Interested parties are welcome to visit NRS to learn more about the research and services the team offers and to identify new opportunities for collaboration. To arrange a visit, please contact nrs_entomology@forestresearch.gov.uk.

Adult *Dendroctonus micans*.

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As the person or organisation who commissions the work on a forestry site, a lot of responsibility rests on the Forestry Works Manager's shoulders. FISA's **Gillian Clark** outlines the demands of the role and upcoming training opportunities for those tasked with fulfilling it.

The Forestry Works Manager (FWM) is pivotal in ensuring safety, health and welfare standards are established, implemented, and maintained with the aim of protecting all site personnel, along with others who may be affected by the work, including third party visitors and members of the public.

The FWM role and associated responsibilities are laid out in the FISA 'Guidance on Managing Health and Safety in Forestry (GMHSF)' document.

It is essential that those fulfilling the role of the FWM be competent to do so. This includes identifying limitations within organisations and individuals and recognising when it is necessary to acquire competent assistance.

Typical tasks that may be delivered by those engaged in the role of a FWM, fully or partially, are indicated in the Core Health & Safety Skills and Operational Hazard tables in the FWM Competency Framework. Organisations and individuals may use these tables to identify or review competency, both within their organisations or in the individuals involved:

- for the work scope they deliver
- for a change or extension of their scope of work
- following a change in their management structure which may affect the delivery of the FWM role.

The framework outlines the main areas of responsibility held by the FWM along with emphasising the essential skill of effective leadership. This will help towards



FORESTRY WORKS MANAGER COMPETENCY & PLANNING CHAINSAW WORKS



a 'safety first' culture on a worksite where each and every person feels they can make a positive contribution to improving the safe working practices and the health of all those engaged in the operations.

All organisations and individuals involved in the delivery of the FWM role

should look to ensure a suitable program of Continual Professional Development (CPD) is in place. This can be a maintaining of the Core Skills, gaining knowledge in other Operational areas or new technologies, or Complementary Soft Skills.

CPD opportunities for FWMs

In 2024, FISA will host regional 'Electricity & Utilities Awareness Days' and a series of short safety webinars held in conjunction with ICF. Toward the end of 2024/early 2025 we will also provide regional 'Working Roadside Awareness Days'.

Details of dates and venues will be advertised on the FISA website and e-update when available.

The existing FWM one-day awareness training remains and those wishing to take this course should contact the training providers listed on the FISA website.

Records of CPD should be documented and maintained. Many organisations will have their own systems for doing this but a



Chainsaw Operations' is a Technical Note published by FISA. The following are included as part of the FWM section in this guidance:

- Identify the need for chainsaw operators e.g. large and over-sized trees, edge trees, windblown, hung up and broken trees, assisted directional fell, and steep or broken ground.
- Engage competent contractors with experience matched to the risks identified.
- Coordinate and manage pre-commencement meeting, confirming safe systems of work and expectations in terms of site monitoring and communication and reporting processes.
- Manage and monitor safe and competent contract performance, completing FISA checks at regular intervals and for new operators.
- Communicate requirements to the main contractor(s) in respect of how all operators are inducted onto site.

Investment in safety – the price rate question

The role of FISA is not to identify work rates and costs. However, it is reasonable to identify the level of equipment, support and resources which are required to operate safely. FWMs and Contractors need to recognise the investment in safety that an operator must incur to complete their work in a professional manner.

Chainsaw operators must be fully trained and equipped to complete the work they are commissioned to do. PPE appropriate to the task and in good condition, compliant with FISA guide 301, must be worn.

Further information on the costing of chainsaw operations is available from the Forestry Contractor Association (FCA).

simple example is given in the framework.

The FISA FWM Working Group have also now drafted the 'FWM Framework for CPD' and will continue to offer support to the industry on the role of the FWM, in safety information, guidance and CPD advice.

Competency and chainsaw safety

Chainsaw operatives are at the greatest risk of accident and injury in forestry and for this reason the Accord sees chainsaw work as the key priority for improving forestry safety.

The planning stages of chainsaw operations may involve representatives from each of the formal roles; but should be led by the FWM. It is the role of the FWM to ensure that an appropriate level of knowledge, experience and competence combine to effectively identify the site-specific hazards, associated risks and allows realistic controls to be implemented.

'Guidance for the FWM - Planning



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New rules on holiday pay – what are the key features?

At the start of 2024, the Working Time Regulations were updated, introducing some changes to holiday pay for workers. Brodies LLP's employment law expert **Brian Campbell** provides a run-through of what employers in the forestry sector need to know about the new rules.

WHO IS ENTITLED TO PAID HOLIDAYS?

Most 'workers' have that right. Your employees will all be workers, but so too are individuals who regularly render their services personally. Every worker is entitled to 28 days of paid leave per holiday year and there is no minimum length of service to qualify.

You can include public or local holidays in this total, as long as you pay people when they are taken. You must pay a pro-rata share of the annual entitlement if the worker works part of the year.

HOW ARE HOLIDAYS ACCRUED?

This depends on whether they work regular hours or if their working pattern varies. The former will accrue an equal proportion of their annual entitlement in each month of the year. For those whose pay varies depending on when or how often they work, or their hours are wholly or mainly variable, or you only employ and pay them for part of a holiday year, new rules apply.

Leave will be accrued at the end of each week or month they are paid, at the rate of 12.07% of the total hours they worked in that period. Holidays accrued should be calculated in hours and rounded up or down to the nearest hour.

HOW DO I CALCULATE A WORKER'S HOLIDAY PAY?

Again, this depends on whether the individual works regular or variable hours.

For a regular hours worker, on a day of leave they should be paid normal wages or salary, plus any regular payments now specifically listed, such as commission personally earned, regular overtime and increments relating to the person's status, seniority or qualifications. Technically, those additional sums only need to be reflected in the first 20 days of annual leave paid, although it may be administratively easier – and an incentive to workers – to add them to the full 28-day entitlement.

For 'irregular' hours workers, there are now two options when calculating holiday pay. You can either pay them each time holidays are taken, but you will need to calculate a rate to pay them each time. This will be the average hourly rate they have received over the last 52 working weeks (or their period of service if shorter). This may



be time-consuming and can mean different amounts being payable each time leave is taken.

The alternative is to pay workers 'rolled up' holiday pay, which involves adding a separately itemised figure of 12.07% to the pay earned in each pay period. Holidays are therefore accounted for as they are earned, and no further payment is necessary when leave is taken.

This was already common practice but is now law.

CAN A WORKER CARRY OVER HOLIDAYS FROM ONE YEAR TO THE NEXT?

This has now been clarified. If a worker cannot take holidays because they were on 'statutory' leave (maternity and other family-related leave), they can carry any accrued holidays into the following leave year. If illness prevented them from using leave, that can be carried forward for 18 months.

Workers are protected against losing their holidays if you fail to recognise their entitlement to take leave, don't give them a reasonable opportunity or encouragement to take it, or don't make sufficiently clear that time not taken before the end of the leave year will be lost.

Regular hours workers can only carry forward 20 days in some scenarios, whereas irregular hours workers are fully protected for 28 days.

ARE THE NEW RULES IN FORCE?

The rules apply in leave years beginning on or after 1 April 2024. For earlier leave years, the rules are a hybrid of the 'old' and new rules.

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THE FESTIVAL OF TREE CARE RETURNS

The ARB Show at Westonbirt Arboretum, 17-18 May

Tickets are now on sale for the biggest UK arboriculture show, promising a unique experience for all those with a passion for trees.

The show came back with a bang last year with over 6,000 showgoers creating a brilliant festival atmosphere all weekend.

This year's show will feature some of the biggest industry brands and the latest arboricultural innovations. There will be plenty of choice, with many activities and over 80 exhibitors showcasing how fast innovation is moving in the arb industry. A strong mix of big names alongside emerging brands will be in attendance, complementing the exciting activities taking place across the site.

The show marks 60 years from the founding of the Arboricultural Association, and the home of tree care will be celebrating in style. Families can visit the public-focused attractions and there will be a chance for visitors to have a go at tree

climbing and access a programme of talks and activities showcasing the importance of arboriculture.

Main event sponsor Först will be returning in style and helping the trade fair to evolve, with activities and attractions for both the industry and the public.

Crowds visiting the National Arboretum can enjoy a packed showground featuring the Först demonstration arena while surrounded by one of the most important tree collections in the world. This showcase of the latest industry innovations and technology will have a new focus on interactive attractions.

Equipment specialists Honey Brothers will return with some exciting plans for the ARB Worker Zone, which will be the main hub for practising arb activities taking place at the show. This popular attraction with practical demonstrations gives arborists the chance to try climbing kit, explore the latest techniques and have a go. All

this will take place alongside a timetable of events each day and a tree climbing tips and tricks drop-in area led by industry experts. At the Great Oak Hall, the Arborists' Workshop talks will once again feature a range of top industry experts sharing knowledge on a variety of subjects.

A new location within the stunning Westonbirt cedar trees provides the perfect setting for the ARB Show Open climbing competition, where competitors of all levels will put on a display of skill and strength.

Over at the ARB Show Activity Zone showgoers will be able to test their skills against the best with the throwline and knot-tying challenges. Last year saw Jay Parker setting an incredible new record time of 5 knots in 15.25 seconds.

The return of the festival presents a chance for the world of tree care to unite and nurture a wider appreciation for ar-

continued on p64



continued from p63

boriculture. Association CEO John Parker said: “The ARB Show is our biggest single opportunity to bring together our industry and the public who have such a keen interest in trees. We look forward to welcoming this arb community of passionate people, so keen to support each other as professionals, learn, share and develop knowledge.”

ARB Show 2024 promises a celebration of trees and the latest advances in tree care and the science of arboriculture. Whether you're an arborist or a nature lover, be sure to visit event that puts trees in the spotlight.

Book tickets at trees.org.uk/arbshow

MEET THE EXHIBITORS

TIPMASTER

Tipmaster build on new and used chassis and can convert existing tippers into Arb Trucks. The bodies are constructed in aluminium sheet that has been fully welded offering a strong, light weight body and they offer materials including GRP and aluminium plank for the construction of sides, rear doors & roofs.. The tipping gears are all heavy duty with electro hydraulic power packs,

Offering a full service Tipmaster can fit ancillary equipment including toolboxes, tow bars, custom paint work, sign writing & LED lighting. Through their sister com-

pany, Perkins Commercial Services (PCS), they can also offer complete new commercial vehicles fitted with the body conversion of your choice, Tipmaster will be exhibiting a range of Arb tippers based on 3.5 ton GVW chassis.

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ATVTrac, the renowned agricultural asset tracker with a proven track record in recoveries, continues to expand its offering in the Arborist industry, providing a discreet yet effective solution to security tracking on all manner of equipment.

Launched over a decade ago, following the parent company's experience in motorcycle security, ATVTrac offers a dedicated security product, enabling owners of all types of machinery to have a live link to their machines 24/7 regardless of location.

Bringing updated security functions including GPS, GPRS and Radio Frequency, ATVTrac added new functions, including lone worker security (for machinery such as all-terrain vehicles), battery voltage alerts and service reminders too.

Thanks to the unit's very small physical size, ATVTrac can be installed on virtually any type of machinery, from ATVs to Land Rovers, to wood chippers, taking a simple 12v feed combined with its own internal battery for smaller machinery applications too.

With location information available via a dedicated app and website 24/7, owners are able to keep a live track of all machin-

ery with the added bonus of support from Securitas too, should a machine be stolen and need securing quickly.

ATVTrac enjoys endorsement from GreenMech Woodchippers, while offering all customers a 0% finance package too, allowing users to not only spread the cost of the physical unit, but subscription fees too.

LANTRA

The Lantra team will be on hand at stand B6 to advise on a range of industry leading chainsaw and forestry training and qualifications, so you can confidently access the right training, at the right time, whatever your level of expertise. The careers team will also be attending to discuss how you can progress your career, or if you're new to the industry, how you can get started on your journey. Corrina Urquhart, Lantra's Director of External Relations, will also be hosting a talk spotlighting the exciting array of careers in the industry in the Careers & Education Hub.

Meanwhile in the main arena, Lantra verifier Andy Campbell will be demonstrating the latest climbing and cutting techniques. With a wealth of experience and practical knowledge, he can answer any questions you may have.

Thinking about becoming an approved training Instructor or Assessor? The Instructor Network team will be available to discuss the next steps, helping to equip your knowledge and skills to the next generation of budding arborists.

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SIBLINGS NOT TWINNS

Eamonn Wall gets behind the wheel of the new VW Amarok V6 and compares it to the 2-litre version of its sister vehicle, the Ford Ranger.

The new Volkswagen (VW) Amarok pickup truck was developed as a joint project between VW and Ford. However, both vehicles share the same production line in the same factory in South Africa. Both vehicles share the same engines and chassis etcetera, with only mild design differences to the body skins. The front design of the two vehicles is the most obvious difference. Strangely the Amarok does not have the rear side step in the body which is very handy when the vehicles are not fitted with a rear canopy. The interiors are very similar too.

There is currently a choice of two engines in the Amarok, both diesel Ford engines manufactured in the UK and shipped out: the 205bhp 4-cylinder and the 236bhp

V6. The previous Amarok was fitted with VW engines and the V6 was very popular.

Both engines are mated to a Ford ten-speed automatic gearbox which change gears very smoothly indeed. The 2-litre engine is a little slow to accelerate both



speedy enough once on the go, whereas the V6 does not feel slow and just gets on with the job of moving this heavy 2.5 tonne pickup.

Naturally it sounds better than the 4-cylinder engine but not as much as expected. It is not what you would call fast and not as powerful as the label suggests. It does not, for example, overtake with the same gusto as a Discovery would. However, it is very competent and a good allrounder.

One thing to bear in mind is that it does like a drink. When I tested the 2-litre Ranger, it averaged about 32mpg but the V6 was around 22mpg. I guess 25mpg might be closer to what you would expect if not doing high motorway speeds. No doubt both vehicles will be heavier on the fuel when towing and doing hard off-road



work, as is always the case.

Four-wheel drive is selected via a rotary controller providing four modes. As with most pickups it has a steel ladder frame chassis and leaf rear springs and a live axle.

The Amarok I tested here is top of the range Pan Americana priced at £47,255 plus VAT, which comes fully loaded with a long list of standard items. It was also fitted with a rear box whose rear glass door/window is connected to the central locking. This V6 model accelerates from 0-60mph in nine seconds, has an 80-litre fuel tank, 19-litre ad blue tank, and comes with a three year / 100,000-mile warranty, and 12 years body protection warranty too.

It has a payload of 1,054kg and can tow a 3,500kg braked trailer. Standard wheels are 17" 255/70 R17 but this vehicle had 18" Amadora black alloy wheels. A tool kit, jack and full-size steel spare wheel are provided. The bright blue paint costs £600.

The vehicle is fitted with electronic stability control, lockable wheel nuts, Isofix child seat anchors, three head restraints in the second row of seats, an anti-theft alarm with interior monitoring, back up horn, and



towing protection. The glove box has illumination, and a leather wrapped multi-function steering wheel complements the leather seats. A leather fillet on the door armrests looked out of place!

Standard equipment also includes a differential lock in the rear, towbar preparation, a fancy Harman Kardon stereo, sat nav, underride guard, LED cargo area lighting, area view 360-degree camera, adaptive cruise control, central locking system with keyless starting, lights and sockets in

the rear, and a tyre pressure monitoring system.

As with the Ranger, the Amarok is a long vehicle being 5,390mm long, 1,910mm wide including the side mirrors, and 1,884mm tall. The interior has been well designed and is a comfortable place to be and work from. Again, the suspension is designed for hard work and carrying loads so when unloaded is a bit giddy. That said, it handles well and has good steering.

When testing the Amarok I jumped into a VW Touareg SUV and the difference was amazing. The Touareg is a much more refined and comfortable vehicle but it's not a work horse pickup and costs from about £60,000.

The new Amarok is a good pickup but not unique by any stretch as it shares so much with the Ranger - which to me is the better-looking vehicle. The V6 version is not as powerful as expected and uses a lot more fuel. No doubt it will be a better towing vehicle.

Eamonn Wall FRICS is Managing Director with Eamonn Wall & Co, Woodland Design and Management.



Spring thoughts from the woodland

Julian Evans reflects on the turn of the seasons and what delights can be found in small woodlands.

As I write this piece, I'm looking forward to an upcoming visit from a local wildlife group. This is a regular commitment, and in most years this late winter/early spring visit is for youngsters of junior school age, but this time all are invited to look for the signs of spring in the first week of March.

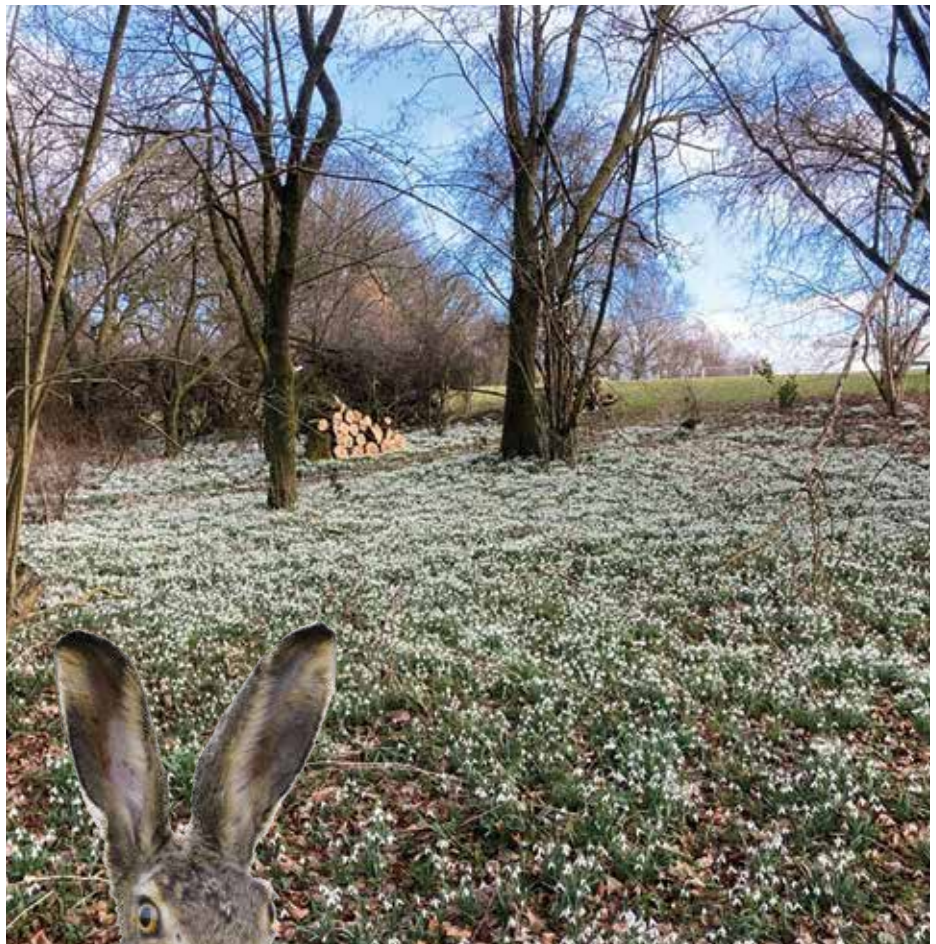
No one needs reminding that the winter was wet – incredibly wet in southern England – and mild. In view of tomorrow's visit, yesterday I checked out my patch following the usual route and noted signs of new life anticipating the new growing season.

On the plant front, I'll be sharing tiny moschatel, emerging wild garlic, and leaves of false oxlips with the visitors, as well as run-of-the-mill dog's mercury, numerous cuckoo pint, the small patch of bluebells, primroses and the like. Early shrubs and climbers just beginning to flush are elder, honeysuckle, clematis and dogwood, and in flower we have blackthorn and the first signs of wild cherry blossom. Hazel catkins are already over, and we are too early to see my mid-spring favourites of wild Solomon's seal and yellow archangel.

Among the trees themselves sycamore are the first to flush followed by birch, but both herald spring long before if in late January or February branches are cut or the tree felled. Stumps quickly become wet all over and cut branch stubs drip sap, sometimes for days. Rising sap from root pressure begins weeks ahead of bud-break and flushing.

Birdsong appears diminished this year, though probably from the owner's diminished hearing (despite wearing aids!) and from not being in the wood at dawn or dusk. I will ask the visitors to record all they hear to provide a snapshot. I'm expecting an increase in wren numbers owing to piles of brash everywhere from last year's heavy thinning, and there is no doubt that kite and buzzard are now commonplace and everyday sights. Tits, warblers and songbirds generally struggle as deer (roe and muntjac) – despite efforts to control and fence out – browse the understorey so reducing cover and food. Pheasants are also regulars having escaped the gun of our neighbours' wintertime shoots.

I'm hoping for a fairly complete inventory as wildlife enthusiasts today come with apps on mobile phones that tell you what birdsong the device can hear! Perhaps they'll pick up the high notes of goldcrests that frequent the crowns of the Douglas firs and overwintering redwings and their



"I'M HOPING FOR A FAIRLY COMPLETE INVENTORY AS WILDLIFE ENTHUSIASTS TODAY COME WITH APPS ON MOBILE PHONES THAT TELL YOU WHAT BIRDSONG THE DEVICE CAN HEAR!"

characteristic 'seep'.

Brown hares are, for me, a delight and are much in evidence in spring. Rabbits are now uncommon, despite my long common boundary with Network Rail and their much-burrowed embankments. The unmistakable whiff of fox still surprises and badgers are in the vicinity if rooting in soil and like disturbances are any evidence. During grey squirrel control I have twice caught (and released) polecats and there's

talk in the press of re-introducing pine martens to Kent and Sussex after successes in Wales and the Forest of Dean.

Will they help keep grey squirrels in check, as has been much reported from experience in Ireland?

Returning briefly to conclude on the subject of apps, some of the most useful are those which aid identification of wild plants. I haven't downloaded one yet, but it is on my 'to do' list.

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Scottish Woodlands Ltd recently announced the winners of its 2024 staff photography competition, celebrating the stunning landscapes and diverse flora and fauna found in the forests managed by the company.

The winning image, featured here, was captured by Regional Manager for South East Scotland Charlotte Cavey-Wilcox. It depicts a female Black Darter dragonfly in the grasses of Ericstane Forest, north of Moffat. The photograph highlights hidden biodiversity in timber-producing forests, with the site recording various butterfly, moth, and dragonfly species.

Scottish Woodlands plans to further enhance the habitat by installing hibernacula (underground chambers) to allow amphibians and reptiles to shelter from the cold, and by cutting back Sitka spruce around the pond edges.

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.

By submitting a picture to Forestry in Pictures you give Confor permission to use the file for non-commercial purposes in Forestry and Timber News or the Confor website. Photos will always be credited.

COMING UP IN JUNE 2024 - GET INVOLVED

In June we will be focusing on Innovation, Technology & Woodfuel. 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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