

Briefing for Westminster Hall debate on *Forestry in England: Seeing the Wood for the Trees* 9 January 2018

These recommendations are structured around the headings of the EFRA *Forestry in England* report. Further detail is provided below.

- Recommendation 1: Introduce a new grant scheme for owners of unmanaged woodland to get advice from forestry professionals with the option of a grant to invest in accessing wood, i.e. in forest road, drainage and loading bays.
- Recommendation 2: Replace the Common Agricultural Policy with a new Common Countryside Policy integrating support for forestry and woodland creation alongside other rural support schemes when the UK leaves the EU.
- Recommendation 3: Provide the same specific assurances on future funding for productive tree planting as is provided for other CAP-linked expenditure and make this clear to devolved governments.
- Recommendation 4: Deliver on its commitment in the Clean Growth Strategy to identify forestry investment zones designed to capture carbon and enhance natural capital.
- Recommendation 5: Prioritise and fast-track productive tree planting applications within these zones to the Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grant scheme that comply with the UK Forestry Standard.
- Recommendation 6: Recognise and measure timber locked up in construction as a vital medium-term carbon sink.
- Recommendation 7: Incorporate a 'UK timber first' policy into UK construction procurement.
- Recommendation 8: Implement an effective programme of Grey squirrel and deer control, to better facilitate the creation of productive, managed broadleaf woodlands.
- Recommendation 9: Phase out firewood imports from abroad both to reduce the threat to biosecurity and to stimulate woodland management through a market for locally-produced wood fuel.
- Recommendation 10: Formalise a written agreement with devolved administrations on UK-wide plant health, forestry research, the UK Forestry Standard and publication of forestry statistics to come into effect when the UK leaves the EU.

Confor: promoting forestry and wood (www.confor.org.uk) is a not-for-profit membership organisation for sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses. Confor represents the whole forestry and wood supply chain and focuses on strategic issues vital to the success and sustainable future of the sector. Confor

submitted [written evidence](#) to the EFRA committee inquiry and Chief Executive Stuart Goodall was called to give oral evidence.

1. Woodland planting and management

In its submission to the EFRA committee inquiry, Confor asked for urgent action to avoid a damaging 'timber gap' in supply for sawmills who have invested tens of millions in manufacturing. Since the EFRA report was published there have been a number of welcome developments:

- The approval of [Lowther](#) and [Doddington](#) new woodland creation schemes in Cumbria and Northumberland. Planting almost a million trees between them and funded largely by private investment, these schemes will provide over 500 hectares of land for softwood and hardwood timber, Red squirrel conservation, the restoration of degraded open habitat, recreation, and other benefits.
- There have been some improvements to Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grant scheme, including a longer application window, better co-ordination between agencies on processing grants, a raised EIA threshold in low-risk areas, the continuation of the Woodland Creation Planning Grant, and the establishment of a Forestry Commission unit to help process large-scale afforestation projects, all of which Confor called for in our initial evidence to the inquiry. There has been initial engagement with the sector through Confor to find ways to resolve problems, but the action 'on the ground' is still to be seen.
- The Committee on Climate Change report, [Closing the Policy Gap](#), advised that 'the pace of removals [of carbon via forestry] is declining due to the ageing profile of trees. Stronger policies are required to meet England and devolved administration ambition for these sectors to 2020 and beyond.'
- The Government's Clean Growth Strategy has recognised forestry and wood processing as an important sector and identifies a number of actions, including creating forestry investment zones. More detail on delivery of these is needed from Defra.
- The Kent Renewable Energy Partnership has been developed to incentivise woodland management in South East England, a project which could be replicated elsewhere.

While these will facilitate woodland creation in the short term, there is no support for landowners to bring older unmanaged woodland into production.

Recommendation 1: Introduce a new grant scheme for owners of unmanaged woodland to get advice from forestry professionals with the option of a grant to invest in accessing wood, i.e. in forest road, drainage and loading bays.

2. The grant schemes for forestry

In the longer term, once the UK leaves the Common Agricultural Policy, it will be vital to have an integrated and outcome-focused land use policy, with one suite of grants and regulations for farming, forestry and other land uses. Confor welcomes speeches made by Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Michael Gove MP moving towards a ‘public money for public good’ approach, and recognition of the role of forestry in enhancing natural capital and creating a better environment.

Confor has issued a [joint statement](#) with CLA and the Woodland Trust on a long-term strategy for forestry. We also held a conference with NFU, CLA, Woodland Trust and, WWF to develop a shared vision of a Common Countryside Policy which included contributions by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment Thérèse Coffey MP and members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Forestry.

We welcome the government’s reassurance to ‘move to a new, more outcome-focused agro-environment scheme’. However, we seek confirmation that modern, multi-purpose forestry for timber production will be fully integrated into this scheme. Confor’s policy document, [A Common Countryside Policy](#), provides more detail on this proposal.

Increased tree planting is recognised as a priority across all four countries of the UK. Planting is stimulated by grant, which comes principally from the CAP. It can take two years or more to plan a large new forest, even before it is submitted for approval to Government, so it is vital that landowners and investors have confidence in the future availability of grants for establishment.

Recommendation 2: Replace the Common Agricultural Policy with a new Common Countryside Policy integrating support for forestry and woodland creation alongside other rural support schemes when the UK leaves the EU.

Recommendation 3: Provide the same specific assurances on future funding for productive tree planting as is provided for other CAP-linked expenditure, and make this clear to devolved governments.

3. A long-term strategy for using UK wood

Confor welcomes the BEIS [Clean Growth Strategy](#). While it reaffirms England's tree planting target of 11 million trees by 2020 (1,100 hectares per year), it explores an ambitious but achievable scenario of 180,000 hectares (c.360 million trees) by 2032 (12,000 hectares per year, about the same amount now being created in Scotland).

The strategy committed to establishing forestry investment zones from 2017, but this has not yet been done.

Carbon Capture and Storage technologies which can lock up carbon for millions of years are not expected to be available until the end of this century. Building cities from timber can lock up carbon for decades or centuries. Accounting for this carbon storage should form the basis of a more effective trading scheme for carbon which takes the full timber supply chain into account.

Timber in construction provides carbon benefit three times over. First, the timber itself is captured and stored carbon. Second, the carbon emissions which would have resulted from the production of brick, steel or concrete, are avoided. Third, the thermal properties of timber makes it the best material with which to build houses at the highest specification of energy efficiency, thus reducing carbon emissions, and raising living standards, of future inhabitants.

A new framework is currently being explored to enable countries to account for carbon removals in timber products, under the Paris Agreement.

Recommendation 4: Deliver on its commitment in the Clean Growth Strategy to identify forestry investment zones designed to capture carbon and enhance natural capital.

Recommendation 5: Prioritise and fast-track productive tree planting applications within these zones to the Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grant scheme that comply with the UK Forestry Standard.

Recommendation 6: Recognise and measure timber locked up in construction as a vital medium-term carbon sink.

4. Getting the most out of forests and woodland

Confor welcomes the equalisation of grant funding for softwoods and hardwoods. However, the value of UK timber in economic, environmental and social terms remains underacknowledged.

The UK is the second biggest net timber importer in the world, after China. This means we spend large sums importing an essential raw material we could produce ourselves, as well as having a heavy environmental impact on global natural forests, instead of creating new forests which would provide an environmental benefit to degraded land in the UK.

Timber can be manufactured into materials to replace other oil-based products in our society, for example the plastic packaging causing such damaging marine pollution.

However, these benefits are only slowly being recognised. The government must accelerate green development by supporting the UK timber industry both through procurement and promotion.

Recommendation 7: Incorporate a 'UK timber first' policy into UK construction procurement.

5. Protecting forests and woodland

Climate change, the increasing volumes of plant material we import, and the doubt over borders and governance caused by Brexit and ongoing devolution within the UK, all mean that the risk of new pests and diseases affecting our forests are increasing. Ash dieback and Larch tree disease (*Phytophthora ramorum*) are both ongoing serious national incidents, and Dutch Elm Disease remains an endemic threat.

To reduce the risk of more outbreaks of this kind it is vital that biosecurity measures are tightened.

A written agreement on how the UK will co-ordinate plant health and forestry research is vital, now that Scottish forestry is being fully devolved.

Restrictions on the imports of firewood and live plant material will not only reduce our exposure to pests. Creating a greater demand for home-grown firewood would also incentivise woodland management; while producing our own plants would boost the UK nursery sector.

Imported plants are used in forestry when fluctuating demand causes nurseries to run short of home-grown stock. Stabilising grants and regulations is essential to enable nurseries to supply the right number of plants into a predictable woodland creation market.

Recommendation 8: Implement an effective programme of Grey squirrel and deer control, to better facilitate the creation of productive, managed broadleaf woodlands.

Recommendation 9: Phase out firewood imports from abroad both to reduce the threat to biosecurity and to stimulate woodland management through a market for locally-produced wood fuel.

Recommendation 10: Formalise a written agreement with devolved administrations on UK-wide plant health, forestry research, the UK Forestry Standard and publication of forestry statistics to come into effect when the UK leaves the EU.

The *Forestry in England* report recognised that forests are essential to developing a sustainable UK. Promoting and incentivising UK timber production is a cost-effective way to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits in both rural and urban communities. By holding the government to account to deliver on its positive words on forestry, the UK parliament has an essential role to play in ensuring this sustainable vision becomes a reality.

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