

# A 40,000ha carbon capture factory



Tree-planting targets are driven by the need to tackle carbon emissions

While foresters might want more forests because they produce valuable timber, and because we love them, for policy-makers, few drivers are strong enough to overcome the risky business of land use change and drive woodland creation, as the more pressing risk of climate change.

Afforestation is one of the most cost-effective means of carbon reduction, according to the UK Committee on Climate Change (see FTN August, p.6). Any 'zero carbon' ambition, to reduce what we can and offset the rest, turns to tree planting as one of very few proven, cost-effective, and large-scale technologies available to remove carbon from the air.

Confor has been at the forefront of thinking on carbon and forestry for over a decade. Our report, *Climate change: opportunities and challenges for the forest and wood-using industry* (2008) was published a year before the seminal 'Read Report', *Combating climate change: a role for UK forests*. Climate change was the headline topic on the Confor website for four years between the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol to the establishment of the Woodland Carbon Code.

Since then, other voices have made our case. In 2013, the Centre for Alternative Technology's *Zero Carbon Britain* calculated that as part of a suite of actions to become carbon neutral, the UK should double forest cover by 2030, which translates into planting an eye-watering 260,000ha every year,

two-thirds of which should be timber producing; plus an additional 250,000ha/year of short-rotation forestry, coppice, and other energy crops.

Now, with stories of heroic tree-planting feats multiplying around the globe and the resulting carbon reduction becoming quantifiable and one of the most hopeful stories of our time, academics, campaigners and politicians are doing the sums again. (See right).

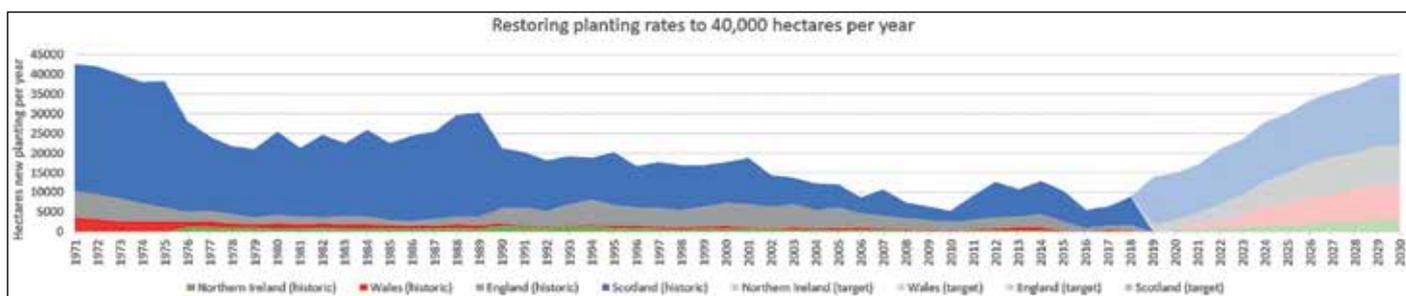
The Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering proposed 1,200,000ha by 2040, or 57,000ha/year, increasing forest cover to 18%. The Committee on Climate Change developed a range of scenarios, one based on UK governments' own targets of 27,000ha/year, which they strongly recommend be met, and explored two others based on 30,000ha and 50,000ha, which they considered achievable and delivering considerable additional benefits.

Environmental organisations, too, have been setting targets. WWF UK tackled the 'zero carbon' question again in 2018: *Keeping it Cool* calculated that the UK should afforest 40,000ha/year. Friends of the Earth proposed doubling forest cover by 2050, equating to 100,000ha/year. The Natural Capital Commission, advising on the 25 Year Environment Plan, recommended a target of 250,000ha by 2040, or 11,300ha/year, in England.

Beside these weighty aspirations, UK governments' targets appear modest. The Scottish Government, it is true, aims to plant 15,000ha/year by 2025, a hefty contribution to an ambitious UK target. The 25 Year Environment Plan's English target equates to 6,200ha/year, lower than an earlier figure in their *Clean Growth Strategy* of 9,300ha, but considerably more ambitious than the '11 million tree' target of little more than 1,000ha/year.

## Confor and climate change

In response to all this renewed interest, carbon and climate has again become a major theme of Confor's work. In December 2018, our *Superwood* conference brought together campaigners, politicians, foresters and architects to discuss the essential role





## RECORD-BREAKING TREE PLANTING AROUND THE WORLD

2015 Pakistan launches its 'Billion Tree Tsunami', currently ahead of target.

2016 50m trees planted in one day in Uttar Pradesh.

2017 66m trees were planted in 12 hours in Madhya Pradesh, India.

2017 200m trees planted or naturally regenerated in drought-stricken Niger, with food production increasing by 600,000 tonnes a year in reforested areas.

2018 China pledges to afforest an area the size of Ireland, to achieve 23% forest cover by 2020.

## PROPOSED UK PLANTING TARGETS

Zero Carbon Britain 260,000ha

Friends of the Earth 100,000ha

Royal Society & Royal Academy of Engineering 57,000ha

Committee on Climate Change High Biomass scenario 50,000ha

**Confor target 40,000ha**

WWF 40,000ha

Committee on Climate Change Multifunctional Land Use scenario 30,000ha

Committee on Climate Change advice 27,000ha

Forestry Strategy (Scotland) 15,000ha

Natural Capital Commission (England) 11,300ha

Clean Growth Strategy (England) 9,300ha

of tree planting and using timber in building a low-carbon economy. In January 2019, Confor organised a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Forestry with Lord Deben, chair of the Committee on Climate Change, to examine building the policy environment to enable trees to deliver their carbon-capturing potential (*FTN February, p10-12*). In the coming year, our essay and video prize *The Future is Forestry* will link to climate change (see p41), and plans are in train for a major policy conference.

Behind the scenes, important ongoing conversations with stakeholders including Friends of the Earth, the Committee on Climate Change, Policy Exchange, Green Alliance, Nature Conservancy, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Institute of Welsh Affairs and others, are ensuring that informed thinking on forestry and its potential are embedded in policy-making across the UK.

To underpin these conversations, Confor has developed a policy paper, *Woodland carbon targets for the UK*, proposing a pathway to upscale woodland creation to 40,000ha/year, and bring woodland into management. While other targets are based on carbon required or land available, Confor's paper takes into account the practical opportunities and constraints for the industry. These targets are deliverable, and the risk of climate change means it is urgent that the UK governments put policies in place to ensure they are delivered.



The role of rapid emissions reduction [...] is widely understood. But it is increasingly clearer that reducing emissions is not enough – we must also actively remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

**Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering, *Greenhouse Gas Removal*, 2018**

You can help. Local campaigns such as 'Zero carbon' or 'Transition' initiatives present a unique opportunity to talk to people who are passionate about tackling climate change, who probably know little about the forestry industry, but for whom we present an important solution: a renewed hope. You should have received a copy of *Woodland Carbon targets for the UK* inside this FTN, and it is also available on our website, along with other resources. Your challenge is to give the paper away to someone who is interested in climate change but doesn't know about forestry and timber production: a politician, a campaigner, or even a potential investor. Use it to start a conversation, and perhaps to invite them to visit your business and see your 'carbon capture and storage technology' in action.