

Will government follow Confor's roadmap for woodland creation in England and Wales... or have they lost their way?

Confor's **Caroline Ayre** and **Anthony Geddes** explore the steps needed to deliver on tree planting targets in England and Wales

New planting is growing to be an angst-inducing topic to industry, government and environmentalists, and more recently has been the subject of competition in the election pledges. The UK Committee on Climate Change directed the previous Westminster administration to plant 27,000ha per annum. With just over a third of this being delivered in Scotland, we ask: can this successful model be adopted to achieve the same south of the border?

England and Wales are only able to bask in the glow of the leading light that Scotland is shining on UK afforestation. In 2020 alone, Scotland is set to beat the 30 million tree planting commitment made in the Conservative manifesto. The required

mix of grit, determination and funding has created what some would call a perfect storm for tree planting. What are the steps needed to deliver on tree planting targets in England and Wales?

Forestry and timber processing accounts for £1 billion GVA and 25,000 jobs in the Scottish economy. It is of equal significance to the English and Welsh rural economies, accounting for £680m (estimated) and £520m, respectively. The value of the forestry and timber industry has not yet been sufficiently appreciated by either of these two administrations.

The most significant driver for tree planting has come from the climate change movement and decarbonisation. But the resource of timber as an industrial product and the benefits that harvested wood products deliver through carbon storage and material substitution, although fully understood, has not been embraced by Westminster or the Senedd. This fundamental loss of the link between tree and timber may be at the core of the difference in attitudes.



Where are we trying to get to?

In response to UK planting achievements to date (table 1) in summer 2019 Confor developed its Think Global, Plant Local campaign which created a target of 40,000ha per annum by 2030 (table 2). This is based on what is realistically achievable from seed stock, nursery capacity and the workforce, given required funding and land availability.

This target has been widely acknowledged as achievable and perhaps tellingly the Liberal Democrat manifesto pledge gets pretty close to the numbers that Confor published earlier in 2019 (fig 3).

Political climate

With political change and the outcome of Brexit still hanging over UK land use policy, the political environment has become even more challenged.

Within the last Westminster parliament a strong policy statement was issued with a clear commitment to support funding for woodland creation through transition from the current Rural Development Programme (Countryside Stewardship) into the new Environmental Land Management Scheme.

The current administration in Wales

Table 1: Actual planting (hectares)

	England		Wales		Total
	Broadleaf	Conifer	Broadleaf	Conifer	
2015	100	2300	0.0	100	2500
2016	0.0	800	0.0	100	900
2017	100	100	200	200	600
2018	200	1300	100	100	1700
2019	400	1000	300	300	2000

Table 2: What needs to be planted to meet Confor's planting targets, assuming 50/50 mix of productive Broadleaf and Conifer (hectares)

	England		Wales		Total
	Broadleaf	Conifer	Broadleaf	Conifer	
2020-2022	4500	4500	2000	2000	13,000
2023-2025	9500	9500	7250	7250	33,500
2026-2028	13,500	13,500	11,250	11,250	49,500
2029-2030	10,000	10,000	9000	9000	38,000



of the public sector's emissions for a year. Continue this to 2030 and the cumulative effect is enough to offset the personal emissions of every resident of Sheffield, Bradford, Manchester, Liverpool and Bristol.

An essential element of this carbon benefit is the production of enough high quality UK grown timber to meet the UK housing need, ensuring that not only are these homes cost-effective to build and run but they are also positive contributors to locking up CO₂.

With the increase in planting and maintenance, harvesting and processing required, the creation of another 9000 jobs in forestry and timber by 2030 (estimated using the agreed methodology of 150 jobs per 10,000ha created in Confor's report, *7000 Green Jobs*) will ensure that rural communities and economies remain vibrant and buoyant resulting in better standards of living and a reduction in rural poverty.

The government that acknowledges and invests in the forest and timber industry will receive the recognition that through having the foresight to back forestry and timber they have helped to mitigate climate change, create new and improved habitats and drive improvements in air and water quality as well as having ensured the industrial supplies are there to meet future housing demands and employment. Not bad for putting a few trees in the ground is it? *Continued on p9*

has been unable to provide similar commitments to its English and Scottish colleagues due to lack of assurances about Westminster funding in a post Brexit environment. The strength of commitment to the National Forest of Wales provides confidence that planting and specifically planting for productive purposes remains at the forefront of their thinking.

Requests to new government

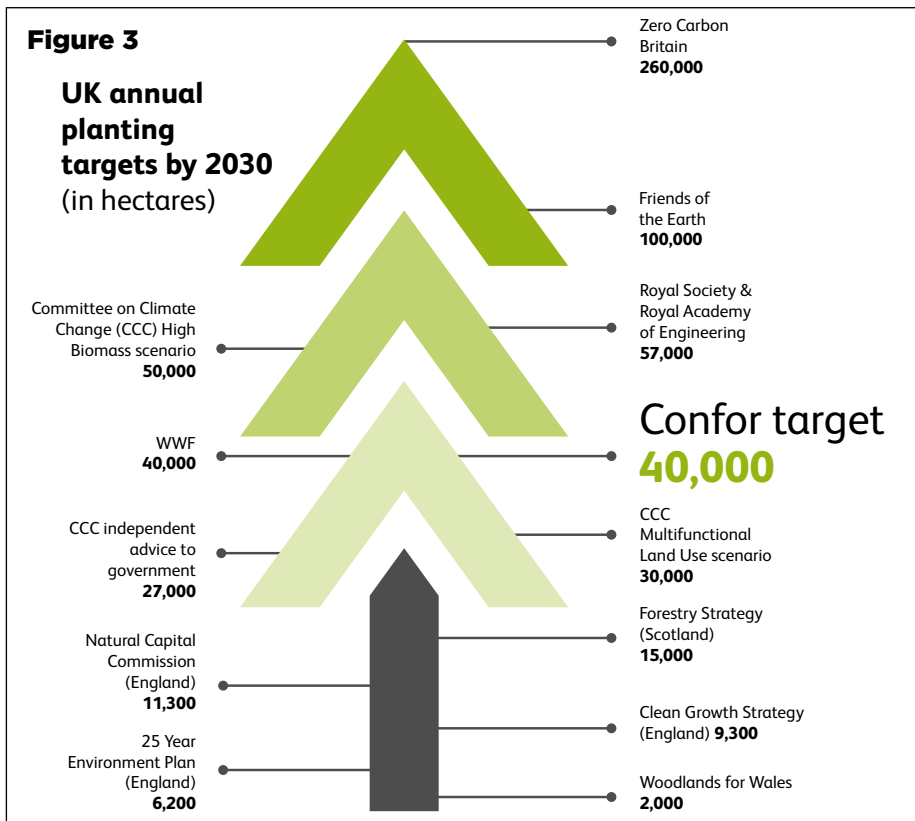
We have listened to members and have distilled their comments and feedback in a series of requests for our new government (fig 4, page 9). None of these requests are new and the echo of them has been heard over the previous decade. The difference now is that there is a more compelling supporting argument.

Positive outlook for an engaged government

We estimate that the government that achieves a target of 80 million trees per annum by 2025 of mixed productive forest under the UK Forestry Standard, would sequester an additional seven million tons of carbon. This is enough to offset the whole

Figure 3

UK annual planting targets by 2030 (in hectares)



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Planting is not the end of the story

Too much woodland in the UK, particularly broadleaf, is unmanaged or undermanaged. Managing existing woodland for carbon has several benefits: there is far more

existing woodland than any potential new planting scheme could create; established trees, when thinned, sequester carbon far more rapidly than newly-planted ones; there are none of the complexities of land use change which new woodland creation involves; and the co-benefits (improved

biodiversity, amenity value, etc) are immediate. Measuring carbon in existing woodlands, and rewarding landowners for management to increase it, will be an essential part of a woodland carbon strategy which delivers immediate and substantial carbon benefits, alongside new woodland creation.

Figure 4 Requests to new government

What do we want?	How can this be achieved?	
	England	Wales
Clear leadership from the English and Welsh Parliaments	Westminster must empower Forestry Commission to take responsibility for delivering planting	Senedd must prioritise immediate planting resources whilst developing a longer term strategy
A streamlined and simplified application process	A reworking of the current system to ensure applications are dealt with fairly and in a timely manner	
A presumption in favour of productive planting	Application scoring to reflect the benefits delivered from new planting including decarbonisation, habitat improvement and timber as a resource	
Secure funding through CAP transition and beyond	Matching the available funding to the cost of delivery and ensuring that incoming government supports industry through transition	
Long-term commitment to the delivery of planting	Development of and commitment to 25-year sustainable forestry and timber plans by Westminster and the devolved administrations	
Funding schemes that support innovation	Flexibility in silvicultural mixes, tree breeding and woodland design to meet landowner objectives within the principles of the UK Forestry Standard	

Confor launches General Election manifesto

The document presents a simple, three-point plan to PLANT MORE TREES, MANAGE OUR WOODS BETTER and USE MORE HOME-GROWN WOOD.

You will find a copy of the manifesto with this issue of FTN - so please share it with parliamentary candidates in your constituency. While we are heartened by the inclusion of tree planting and home-grown timber in party manifestos, it is important that the importance of the sector is reinforced at every opportunity.

Stuart Goodall, Confor's CEO, says: "This has been called the climate election and it is great to see all the main parties recognising the vital role tree planting and wood use has to play in mitigating the damaging effects of climate change.

"The manifesto is very simple, with three key points. First, a large increase in tree planting across UK is needed to start making an impact - and this will require political leadership, improved approval processes and joined-up policy. We have seen this happen in Scotland and while there are some bold commitments in the manifestos, we need a real cultural change for this to happen in England, Wales and Northern Ireland."

Confor's planting ambition, outlined in Woodland Carbon Targets, released in April, is included in the

manifesto. It calls on all parties to commit to Confor's "ambitious but achievable" targets of 30,000 hectares of new planting annually across the UK by 2025 and 40,000 ha by 2030."

Mr Goodall added; "However, the manifesto is not all about new planting. It also calls for our existing woodlands to be better-managed, to unlock their potential to deliver a wide range of benefits.

"Managing our existing woods better can deliver speedier benefits in terms of mitigating climate change more effectively through tree growth and use of wood, but also delivering wider benefits in terms of biodiversity, rural employment, recreation and much more.

"Finally, using more home-grown wood can have a positive impact on reducing the UK's forest footprint."

The manifesto also stresses that modern, mixed-species forestry can deliver on a whole range of economic, environmental and social agendas. It can also be found on our website under Publications, and we encourage you to share online copies with politicians and other interested parties.

If you would like more physical copies of the Confor manifesto, please email stefanie.kaiser@confor.org.uk

