

## FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

# Planting the seed – tree target could give Scots farmers new opportunities

As we settle into 2020 and think about taking down the festive decorations, we should pause to reflect that trees are not just for Christmas.

Hopefully, everyone has plans to recycle their real Christmas tree, so it can be turned into compost or chippings. Anything else would just be wrong, as trees are the ultimate in sustainability – when you harvest them (normally for much longer-term uses than Christmas trees), you can plant more in their place and the wood itself is normally reusable.

Most Christmas trees come from specialist farms, though they can also be from so-called ‘nurse crops’ for new woodland of broadleaf trees.

This is a reflection of the way that forestry in Scotland has changed since the Forestry Commission was established in 1919. Then the focus was maximising production of timber for pit props, now more and more people are planting woods and benefiting from them in different ways.

Recently came across an enterprising forest owner in Aberdeenshire who produces foliage for wreaths, while an increasing number in the farming community have begun to embrace forestry this year, recognising the opportunity to diversify into an activity that doesn't rely on



**Stuart Goodall is enthusiastic about plans to create broadleaf woodlands and diversify the rural economy**

long-term annual payments from the government.

With the future shape of rural funding uncertain after Brexit, there is an increasing realisation among farmers that trees can provide shelter for sheep in winter, improving animal welfare and reducing feed costs – as well as offering fuel for the wood burner.

Looking ahead, and with New Year resolutions in mind, I hope that Scottish Government and the forestry sector will do more to grasp the opportunities presented by the hundreds of thousands of broadleaf trees – birch, sycamore, aspen, oak and more – planted in new, mixed-species woodlands.

Traditionally they haven't been looked after as they grow – if they were, Scotland could produce more high-quality wood for bespoke houses, for flooring, windows and other domestic uses.

These trees would be very valuable alongside the softwoods which supply timber to sawmills or wood panel businesses – and provide

many domestic wooden products which we all take for granted. While these modern, mixed forests are growing, thousands of us will enjoy walking, cycling or bird-watching in the woods.

How many of you have been out for a walk in the woods over the Christmas holidays so far? If not, there is still time to walk, run or cycle off some of those extra festive pounds.

In 2019, the Scottish Government surpassed its annual new planting target of 10,000 hectares (about 20 million trees) and just before Christmas, the SNP committed to planting 18,000ha (about 36 million trees) annually in Scotland by 2030.

There is cross-party support at Holyrood for more tree planting, given the recognition of the key role these forests can play in the fight against the damaging impacts of climate change, as growing trees soak up carbon and wood products store carbon.

When I began my career in the



↑ Confor CEO Stuart Goodall, left, Deidre Brock SNP MP for Edinburgh North and

forestry sector in the 1980s, planting and managing trees was for the few, and most of us had little awareness of its wide-ranging benefits – to the woodland owner and to our society, our rural economy and our

environment. In just under a year's time, Glasgow will host the major climate change summit COP26 – a great opportunity to realise the wide-ranging benefits of planting more trees and managing the ones

we already have much more effectively than we did in the past.

Trees are a vital component of what Scotland can do to face up to climate change, our most fundamental global challenge – something to

reflect on before we take down the Christmas tree.

Stuart Goodall is chief executive of Confor, which represents 1500 forestry and wood-using businesses: [www.confor.org.uk](http://www.confor.org.uk)



## How we use land has to change for the benefit of all – and the planet

We need to take a closer look at the way we use land. Why? Because land use has very real consequences for us all and, at present, our land is managed in a way that does not necessarily deliver all the benefits it could.

This is an increasingly pressing issue. The Scottish Government has acknowledged the climate and biodiversity emergencies and respected bodies like the Committee on Climate Change have suggested that we will only meet our new emissions reduction targets if there is significant land use change. Land is, therefore, a critical asset and we need to make sure we are using it effectively in the context of both the climate and biodiversity crises.

Last year the Committee on

Climate Change published a report on climate and land use in the UK and concluded that the current approach is not sustainable.

Land can deliver a wide range of things – it can be used to produce food or to grow timber, sequester and store carbon, be managed to help reduce flooding, provide a home for nature and sites for producing renewable energy.

It also provides beautiful landscapes for everyone to enjoy. The list goes on. But today, land is often used with only a few of these benefits in mind. The focus on food, timber and game management sometimes means that many of the wider benefits are overlooked or are second order concerns.

As a result, Scotland's land is not always being managed in a way that

optimises the benefits it could deliver to society as a whole.

At the same time, the committee has also identified that Scotland has the ability to meet emissions reduction targets earlier than the UK as a whole because of the potential we have to use our land resources differently.

The committee suggests that some agricultural land could be put to another use and it advocates a substantial increase in the area of woodland.

We stand at a point in time when we recognise that current land use policies are far from sustainable and we need land to deliver more.

This is why we need to look again at land use. Some fresh thinking is required. We need to think strategically about what we want land to

deliver and we need to design better policies to shape the way we use our limited land resources.

Fortunately, the Scottish Government has recognised these issues.

It has announced a more regional approach to land use decision-making recently in its Programme for Government, committing to the creation of new regional partnerships which will produce Regional Land Use Frameworks by 2023.

This approach should lead to better and more informed choices about land use and it is welcome news. It represents a step towards more critical thinking about how we can optimise land use and towards a policy and financial support regime for rural land managers that is much more focused on delivering public goods. Developing a region-

Dr Andrew Midgley welcomes a Scottish Government initiative

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