

FORESTRY & TIMBER NEWS

December 2025 / January 2026 Issue 132

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REVIEW



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Optimism and opportunity for the new year



STUART GOODALL

CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
CONFOR

In a Netflix documentary, prepared with the support of WWF, Sir David Attenborough talks about 'How to save our forests and rewild our planet'. One of the solutions he refers to is using more timber from "well managed forests" supplemented by wood from a "new generation of plantations" which support wildlife and benefit local communities and economies.

That sounds exactly like what we're doing, and Confor will refer to the documentary in support of its lobbying for the 2026 Scottish and Welsh elections.

The income from selling timber, as we all know, supports the sustainable management of woodland – "the wood that pays is the wood that stays" is an old maxim.

There are other potential income streams available to a woodland owner, but I would contend that timber production is key if we look across the UK's forests. Crucially timber is also something we can work with to better support sustainable woodland management. For example, we can look to increase the productivity of the trees we grow and the breadth and value of the markets for the timber we produce.

In recent years, Confor has been successful in highlighting to policymakers and politicians that we have a real issue of domestic timber

security. We import over 80% of the wood products we consume, and consumption is rising here and abroad, while growth in global supply lags behind.

If we look at the long-term picture, there are reasons to be optimistic and there are opportunities to make a difference. Demand/supply changes drive price changes – over time. We are still identifying and putting in place productivity improvements and gaining support to use more homegrown wood.

As we've seen in 2025, we can't force up prices and margins in the immediate term; but working together we can make a real and meaningful difference in the medium to longer term. And the political and policy environment is becoming more supportive of that.

At Confor's London conference, UK Forestry Minister Mary Creagh spoke about delivering policy faster to support the industry. That will undoubtedly help, and there is also much we can do ourselves together as a sector.

This festive season, my plan is to go a little easier on the turkey and the New Year celebrations – there's a lot to do in 2026 and I'm excited about getting stuck into that!

May I take this opportunity, on behalf of the team, to thank you for your continued support of Confor and to wish you all the best for 2026.

Confor is a membership organisation that promotes sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses. Confor members receive *Forestry and Timber News* for free as part of their membership. For more information on membership, visit www.confor.org.uk/join-us. Past issues and articles can be accessed online at www.confor.org.uk/news/ftn-magazine.

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EDDER ACRES WOODLAND

Shotton Colliery, Co. Durham
175.82 acres / 71.15 ha

A p2023 mixed plantation registered and validated under the Woodland Carbon Code. Mix of conifer and broadleaved species with Scots pine, Norway spruce and Western red cedar. Also includes oak and silver birch. Regular maintenance has been carried out. Good growth across the plantation.

Sporting rights owned and included.
Good access. Freehold.

Guide price £1,250,000



AMERSIDELAW FOREST

Chillingham, Nr Wooler,
Northumberland
391.06 Acres / 158.25 Ha

A large, well-managed commercial forest entering a new rotation in good condition. This forest, with its stunning location and all of its productive ingredients, is an extremely attractive forestry investment and includes a forest lodge and wild swimming pond.

Sporting rights owned and included in the sale.
Freehold.

Guide price £2,600,000



THE NEAUDD

Dolanog, Powys
46.49 Acres / 18.81 Ha

With excellent access to nearby timber markets, The Neuadd is a well located mixed age commercial plantation with a history of good conifer growth.

Sporting rights owned and included.
Good access. Freehold.

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SELATTYN WOODS

Selattyn, Oswestry, Shropshire
Lot 1: 48.32 acres / 19.55 ha
Lot 2: 20.31 acres / 8.22 ha
Lot 3: 40.39 acres / 16.35 ha

The woods are second rotation timber resource developing fast and approaching first thinning.
Sporting rights owned and included.
Good access. Freehold.

Guide price Lot 1 £250,000

Guide price Lot 2 £110,000

Guide price Lot 3 £225,000



PEN-Y-FFRITH

Alwen Reservoir, Cerrigydrudion,
Denbighshire
180.14 Acres / 72.90 Ha

Three plantations of mainly late rotation Sitka spruce planted in the late 1980s on a technically excellent site and now with large quantities of mature timber available to harvest subject to felling licence.
Good access. Freehold.

Sporting rights owned and included.

Guide price £1,045,000



BELL COPPICE

Far Forest, Cleobury Mortimer,
Shropshire
203.45 Acres / 82.33 Ha

A premier productive well-managed Oak woodland.
Deer fencing.
Stream.
Timber ready to harvest.
Good access.

3 meadows included in sale.
Freehold.

Sporting rights owned and included.

Guide price £1,350,000



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COMMUNICATION, CERTAINTY AND COMMITMENT

The Confor annual UK policy conference kickstarted conversations on finding the wood supply, workforce and money to achieve the goals set out by the Timber in Construction Roadmap. Reporting by **David Lee**.

The UK's Forestry Minister opened 'Timber in Construction: From Roadmap to Reality', Confor's annual UK policy conference, with the strongest commitment yet to working with industry to deliver the Timber in Construction Roadmap.

In a video message from the COP30 climate summit in Brazil, Mary Creagh CBE MP said: "We are working to ensure timber is considered at every stage of the building process - from design and procurement to delivery and maintenance.

"We are committed to supporting innovation in engineered timber, modular construction, and hybrid materials. We need to use more home-grown timber. And we need to grow more of it."

The clear support for the industry set the tone for the event, which invited representatives from around the sector and beyond to gather in London on 20 November.

Andy Leitch, Deputy CEO of Confor, welcomed the positive words and highlighted the need for delivery: "We have made huge progress - and there is a much more positive attitude towards productive forestry - but the key statement [by the Minister] is about delivery.

"If we can deliver, it could be transformational in economic and environmental terms and the impact on national targets."

The focus must be on increasing

the use of home-grown timber in construction, he said, stressing that we had to plant the trees [productive conifers] that industry needs.

Mr Leitch said all the major UK housebuilders have invested in timber-frame manufacturing plants. Although they have not been activated yet, this signals a clear direction for the industry, with the capacity to build around 100,000 homes using timber frames.

Currently, only around 10% of new homes are built with timber frames in England, compared to 90% in Scotland. Several speakers noted the potential to increase the use of home-grown timber in construction by pushing up the percentage of timber-frame new-builds in England.

Mr Leitch continued, saying there are positive signs of the market for timber in construction increasing, but also challenges with long-term supply. More UK timber will come to market over the next 15 years, but supply challenges will

hit in the early 2040s, with a potential timber shortfall of around 1 million cubic metres in England by then.

At least 40,000 hectares of new productive conifer planting (and probably closer to 100,000ha) will be needed to bridge the gap.

Timber in Construction in Practice

Pat Glennon, Joint Managing Director of Glennon Brothers, described a tight supply chain which sees Scottish-grown timber transported to the company's sawmill in Troon, Ayrshire (35% of it by sea) - then moved to Alexanders Timber Design (ATD) six miles away in Irvine after being cut, graded and treated. The timber frames made at ATD are then sent out to housebuilding locations in Scotland for on-site assembly.

Glennons is manufacturing 2,500 timber frame units annually, using recently-installed robotic technology, and had the capacity to increase this to 3,500 by adding a third shift. Mr Glennon



Above LtoR: Andy Leitch; Tim den Dekker and Pat Glennon.
Below: The skills panel.

said there were opportunities to copy Glennons' sustainable "Forest to Front Door" supply chains - "an exceptional example of a circular economy" - in other parts of the UK.

He concluded by saying that "realistic but demanding afforestation targets" were needed to underpin the future of the UK wood processing industry.

Tim den Dekker, Associate Architect at Feilden Clegg Bradley, said the timber industry had to be more sophisticated in terms of measuring and proving the carbon benefits of timber. Better methodology and data were needed, as well as clarity, certainty and direction - which could potentially be delivered by new regulation, he said. Mr den Dekker also challenged the industry to ask whether buildings could be better long-term carbon stores than forests - especially as forests were increasingly susceptible to wildfires.

Rob MacKenna, General Manager at James Jones & Sons, described how the C16 strength class of wood was suitable for the vast majority of UK construction projects - but architects and structural engineers constantly specified the stronger C24, which is mostly imported.

James Jones joined forces with BSW Timber, and Glennon Brothers, who collectively produce the vast majority of the UK's C16 sawn timber, supported by Confor and Timber Development UK, to launch the campaign in October 2025.

Mr MacKenna said the campaign needed to find champions in the architectural and engineering professions: "C24 is the default of



With the kind support of Lantra UK, seven apprentices and students in forestry related fields were able to attend Timber in Construction: From Roadmap to Reality. The event is an excellent opportunity for newcomers to the industry to gain insight on the issues impacting various areas of the sector, network with current leaders and professionals, and get an idea of what their future careers may have in store.

Award recipients pictured with Daisy Hooper, Director of Policy, Research and External Relations, Lantra UK (top left).

structural engineers and architects, through training, habit, default and software programmes. We need to move the language to C16 and get them to specify [more C16] at the outset, or nothing else follows on."

In answer to an audience question, Mr MacKenna said the campaign - which is in its very early days - would work with building merchants to increase their

understanding of home-grown C16 and its potentially much greater use.

Dr Anna Brown, Director of Forest Services at the Forestry Commission also called on the industry to be much better in communicating its message out to the wider public. "Collectively, we must improve our storytelling and talk to a wider range of people," she said, quoting a statistic that 41% of people don't want to see a tree chopped down in any circumstances.

"We need to connect timber and productive forestry to things people know about, products around them." She used the example of a family whose bathroom, kitchen and living room looked dramatically different when all the wood products were removed - and eventually their house fell down because it was built with a timber frame.

She talked about the Forestry Commission's #TreesToTimber campaign, and the importance of focusing on positive messages about trees and timber, and solutions to problems faced by people and society.

Trying to fix the people problem

A session on skills at the conference heard positive messages about proactive efforts to provide more people with the skills required to support the industry's future.

Steve Fowkes, Senior Adviser, Sector Capacity at the Forestry Commission, said the Forestry Sector Skills Plan, launched this year and covering the decade to 2035, provided a blueprint to tackle a stark challenge.

"We do not have enough people with the skills we need now, never mind in the future. We need thousands of people to do jobs at entry level, then hopefully they can move on within the industry," he said.

Mr Fowkes bemoaned the fact that only 51 funded forestry apprenticeships had been completed in England within the last five years - and said this had to change.

He described the next key project after the publication of the Sector Skills Plan - an ongoing Labour Market Intelligence census. Urging industry to take part, he said: "We are defining critical roles, looking at how many people we need and who is doing what now. What KSBs (Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours) do we need? And have we got a product to do that?"

Melanie McEwen, six weeks into her role as Operations Director of Forestry Training Service UK, said 20 companies had already offered support.

"We are working to understand what >>



Clockwise from above: Dave Robertson and Olly Hughes; Rob MacKenna and Stuart Goodall.

is the exact problem we are trying to resolve, and what we need," she said. "We will share good practice, identify gaps, and develop training. There was a clear message from the Minister - that people are needed to deliver our targets, for our climate, our economy and our communities."

Skills is one of the five 'planks' of the Timber in Construction Roadmap and the conference heard of pragmatic new approaches to attract more diversity into the profession. One example is the Forestry Operations New Entrants Programme, a five-week course at the UHI Scottish School of Forestry (SSF) in Inverness, targeted at young people and career changers.

Isla Campbell, Forest Manager with Scottish Woodlands Ltd, which provided technical support and equipment for the programme (funded by Par Equity and Aviva Investors) said: "The participants were funded for the duration of the course and given a short, sharp introduction to the practical skills needed to work in forestry operations - to make them feel ready to go into the world of work and hit the ground running."

The practical skills taught on the course included tree planting and management, driving All-Terrain Vehicles, pesticide spraying and the use of brush cutters and strimmers.

Cora Pfarre, Head Forester at Maydencroft Ltd, said her company's GreenSkills Training Academy was offering short, sharp introductions to forestry for people who were unemployed, to give them a taste of what the industry had to offer.

Steve Fowkes said short taster courses had a part to play, but that it was vital to provide more funded, long-term courses to get people into long-term forestry careers.

Naomi Matthiessen, Deputy Director of Landscapes, Nature and Forestry for the Welsh Government, said there was a real "lack of visibility" of any forestry or timber careers, and said that had to be addressed.

Cora Pfarre stressed the vital role of soft skills for new entrants to the profession, especially communication, as foresters were often dealing with a vast range of different people. She said resilience and leadership (including good people management) were also vital, as well as curiosity and a commitment to long-term learning.

There was a strong sense that the language of "ageing workforce" needed to be reframed as "a wealth of experience" and that the profession



Confor has become a signatory organisation of the Armed Forces Covenant, demonstrating our commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community in transitioning to forestry and timber careers after active service.

Chief Executive Stuart Goodall was joined by Major Tom Hallett at our policy conference, 'Timber in Construction: From Roadmap to Reality', for the official signing.

Our thanks to Mission Community for their support through the process, and to our members and partners who have contributed to Confor activities with military personnel in recent years.

needed to tap into this experience to train new people coming through.

Finding the money to make it happen
Investors require certainty of outcomes, and an acceptable level of risk, to put significant sums into commercial schemes, the conference heard. Uncertainty is the biggest challenge to ensuring large-scale investment continues to flow into productive forestry.

Andy Leitch, Deputy CEO of Confor, said £500 million is waiting to be invested to plant productive forestry in England.

Olly Hughes, Managing Director of Gresham House Forestry, said his company had already deployed around £1.5 billion of investors' assets into forestry - and said this needed to be seen as "patient capital" that was supporting positive environmental and economic outcomes. Too often, the language was more around words like "vultures", he said, and the challenge remained in terms of how people perceived large-scale forestry investment.

This was increasingly presenting itself in very vocal, localised criticism of large planting schemes, sometimes followed by legal avenues. Harry Humble, of True

North Asset Partners, said his company was facing two judicial reviews, one in England and one in Scotland - and said developers needed to feel that "regulators have our backs" when high-quality schemes compliant with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) were submitted.

"The regulators are not always bold enough to close down unfounded criticisms," Mr Humble said, noting that the situation was more challenging in Scotland than England.

One audience member said that when schemes were delivering significant benefits for the UK environment and economy, their strategic importance had to be given much more weight.

David Robertson, Investment & Business Development Director at Scottish Woodlands Ltd, said he and his colleagues were engaging in "courageous conversations" to address criticism of planting schemes at local level. Both he and Mr Hughes said early-stage, more informal engagement was helpful in answering very basic questions about projects.

"It's about taking the heat out of conversations, communicating at the earliest possible stage, and not waiting until you are on the defensive," Mr Hughes said.

Xander Mahony, Head of Forestry Investment at Tilhill, said one of the core challenges was that people generally did not like change, and that afforestation often represented something new and uncertain to local communities.

David Robertson said there was a major problem with regulators demanding that developers go way above the UKFS and deliver UKFS+ or UKFS++ schemes. He said this often added to already lengthy timeframes in getting schemes approved, and bemoaned regional variations and inconsistencies.

"We need stable regulation with clear and defined outcomes," he said. "Not five different conservancies and 50 woodland officers all with different opinions."

Olly Hughes said uncertainty and heightened risk meant there was a danger that capital would go to forestry schemes elsewhere, with Australia currently a very favourable market delivering swift approvals and double-digit returns.

He said his message to Minister Creagh would be: "Be bold and have conviction to support our sector; there will never be such a great amount of capital waiting to be invested in forestry."



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We have the Roadmap: Now let's deliver

Though unable to attend Confor's 2026 Policy Conference in person, Forestry Minister Mary Creagh CBE MP delivered a strong message of support for the industry.

This speech text has been shortened and rephrased by Confor for publication in the Print edition.

I wish I could have attended Confor's conference in person this year.

However, I was in Belém, at COP30, working to ensure that nature, forestry, and sustainable land use are central to global climate ambition.

At home, this ambition was recently furthered by the announcement a second new national forest is confirmed for the Ox-Cam corridor, and a competition will launch in early 2026 to determine the location of a third forest in the Midlands or North of England.

The Government's decision to adopt the revised Timber in Construction Roadmap was a statement of intent. A recognition that timber is not a niche material, but a national asset. That it belongs at the heart of our housing strategy, our climate response, and our rural economy.

We see timber as a cornerstone of the future - not only for the 1.5 million warm and sustainable homes we've pledged to build, but for the communities who will build them, live in them, and thrive because of them.

The Timber in Construction Roadmap and the National Wood Strategy are our blueprints for change. They will set out how we will grow our woodland cover, restore biodiversity, and strengthen the timber supply chain - all while delivering for nature, climate, and communities.

The Roadmap sets out a clear ambition: to increase the use of timber in construction, reduce embodied carbon, and build a resilient domestic supply chain. It aligns with wider Government goals - from net zero to skills - and provides a practical framework for action.

We are working to ensure that timber is considered at every stage of the building process - from design and procurement to delivery and maintenance - and we are



committed to supporting innovation in engineered timber, modular construction, and hybrid materials.

We need to use more homegrown timber. And we need to grow more of it.

That means working with colleagues - in Housing, Communities and Local Government - to promote timber through procurement, planning, and design. It means making timber visible, viable, and valued.

As we announced in October, the Government has reviewed its Timber Procurement Policy and decided that three major timber certification schemes (FSC, PEFC, and Grown in Britain) are suitable for government purchase of legal and sustainable timber. Grown in Britain's success marks the first time a British certification scheme will be recognised in government policy.

This is a significant step forward in driving demand for more homegrown timber.

Tree planting in England is at the highest recorded rate in over 20 years, with over 7,000 hectares planted in 2024-25. The proportion of conifer planting has also increased to 12% of total planting.

However, we have more to do and we have committed to spending over £1bn this parliament on tree planting and support to the forestry sector.

Productive forestry and nature recovery are not in conflict. They are companions. When designed well, productive woodlands can support wildlife, improve soil health, and create corridors for species. They can be places of beauty, of biodiversity, and of economic resilience.

That is why we recently announced we are exploring a new Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund offering upfront payments

to landowners to plant woodlands, tackling one of the major barriers to tree planting. The fund (backed by up to £250m) will give growers financial certainty and help accelerate tree planting.

We are working to ensure that forestry is seen as investable - with clear returns, stable policy, and long-term vision. Additionally, we are exploring how blended finance, green bonds, and carbon credits can support woodland creation at scale.

I look forward to speaking with investors in the new year at a meeting facilitated by Confor to explore how we can unlock more private capital for woodland creation and timber production.

I also want to acknowledge the Trust UK C16 campaign: a powerful example of how industry can lead the way in driving progress. This collaboration to promote the use of domestically grown and manufactured timber supports the Timber in Construction Roadmap and aligns with national goals for decarbonisation, economic growth, and forestry expansion.

Forestry must be a sector where everyone feels welcome - where women, young people, and those from underrepresented backgrounds can find purpose, pride, and opportunity.

We must do more to open doors. That means outreach in schools, apprenticeships in underserved areas, and visible role models from all backgrounds. Our investment in apprenticeships and training will boost rural employment and equip people with skills for green jobs.

Let us grow the timber we need. Let us build the homes we need. Let us restore the nature we've lost. And let us do it together - with courage, with care, and with conviction.

No slowdown going into the New Year

Confor Chief Executive **Stuart Goodall** reflects on the progress made this year and details the work already lined up for 2026.

Autumn has been a particularly busy time in politics for Confor, and the new year offers no respite as it's likely to see political parties in Scotland and Wales ramp up their activity ahead of the elections in May 2026. Discussions have begun with the parties and Confor will be launching its manifestos for the industry.

As is reported elsewhere in FTN, forestry Minister Mary Creagh CBE gave a very strong presentation to our London conference. The Minister recognised her work with Confor and emphasised the importance of producing more wood and using more home-grown timber for both the economy and climate. She also committed to working with industry to deliver the Timber in Construction Roadmap and England National Wood Strategy.

A tangible manifestation of this support can be seen in the UK Government's recently published Environmental Improvement Plan which explicitly references the need to increase productive planting. The Minister will also meet a delegation of Confor member investors in January to discuss how government and industry can work together to unlock greater investment, with the aim of finally increasing productive woodland planting at scale in England.

Since the cut to the 2024/25 Scottish planting budget announced in December 2023, Confor and Woodland Trust Scotland hold regular meetings with the Cabinet Secretary. This has helped deliver an average of 12,000

hectares of new planting each year over the last two years, and a 20% uplift in this year's planting budget. However, concern remains over long-term industry confidence to plant at scale.

With the support of Ms Gougeon, Confor has worked with members to analyse future demand for land to plant and the obstacles to securing a step change towards delivering government's target of 18,000 ha/yr. Following a productive meeting with Scottish Forestry, Confor will brief the Cabinet Secretary and seek to secure her support for actions to speed up approvals and increase predictability.

The development of a Welsh Timber Industrial Strategy was welcomed by all parties in the Senedd and Confor will seek to continue that theme of cross-party support for the industry at a political event we are organising in January. It will bring together the different parties of Wales, and we will showcase how our sector can contribute to the work of the Senedd and offer solutions to challenges such as economic growth, the provision of green jobs and delivery of ecosystem benefits.

We will also highlight the missed opportunities for Wales if we do not achieve targets for tree planting, grow the workforce and harvest timber in a timely manner.

Whoever forms the next Scottish Government will need to tackle crises in the cost of living, the climate and in housing. A central theme of our manifesto, Timber is the Future, is that the industry can assist in tackling all of

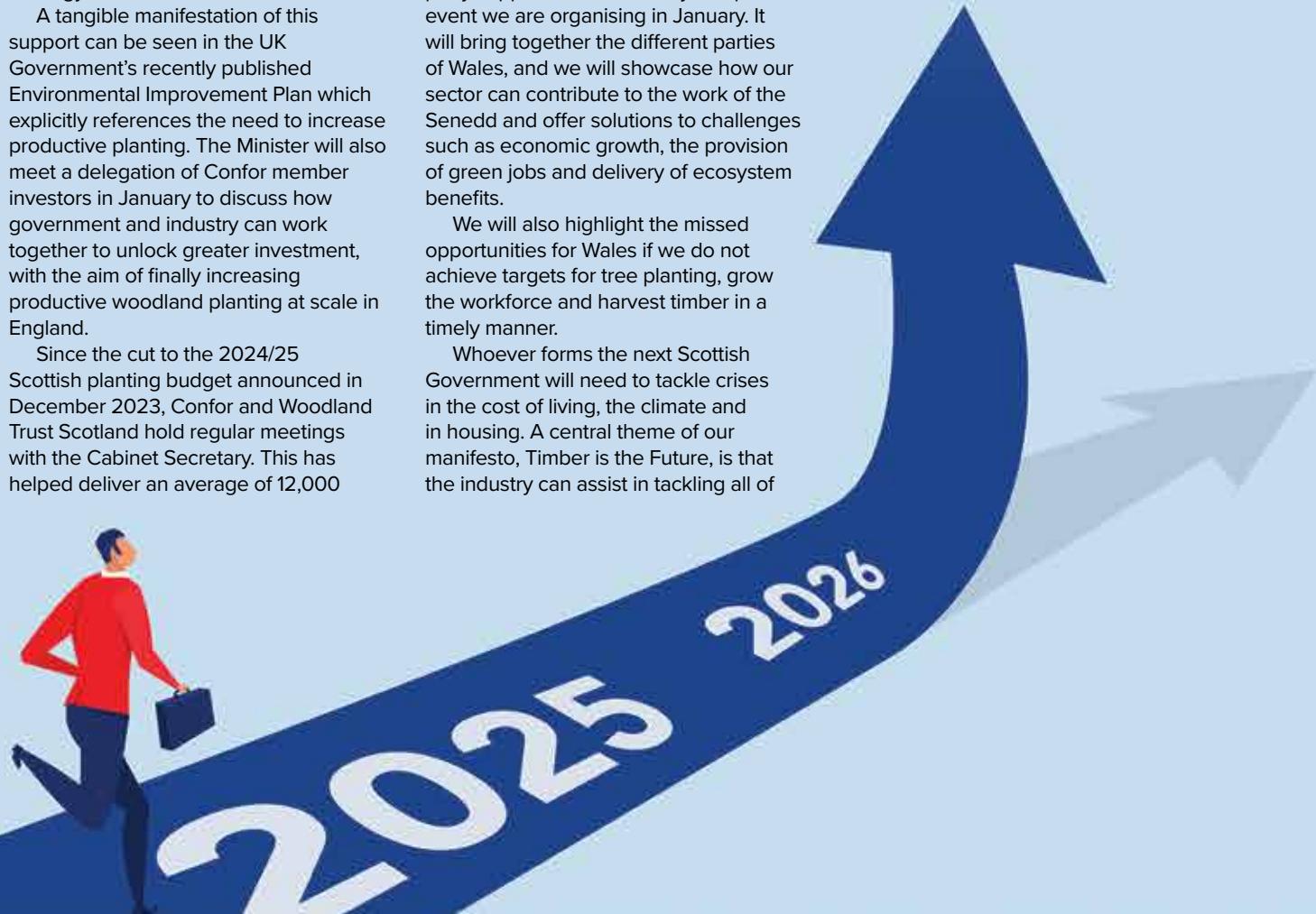
these and more. We ask that the next Scottish Government:

- Create a timber industrial strategy for Scotland
- Plant more trees
- Use more wood in construction
- Create a skills strategy for Scotland
- Refresh - and futureproof - the Scottish forestry strategy

In Holyrood, Confor supported Scottish Land and Estates in its lobbying on a Land Reform Bill - passed on 5 November. Amongst other things, the Bill will see forest estates above 1,000ha subject to potential lotting requirements when the landowner comes to sell. Much of the detail is still to come via secondary legislation

Confor has been active in briefing MSPs debating the committee stage of a natural environment Bill which aims to provide a legal and policy framework to protect, restore, and sustainably manage Scotland's natural environment.

Green and Labour MSPs have put forward amendments, including making EIAs mandatory on new productive planting projects above 50ha; the introduction of a requirement to assess projects containing Sitka for potential future spread of seed beyond boundaries and making owners liable for that; and to stop funding for deer fencing in new woodland.



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Confor launches Scottish election manifesto for 2026

Confor has released a manifesto for the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections, with a clear message: Timber is the Future.

The manifesto is targeted at all parties contesting the elections to Holyrood in May 2026 and focuses on five key actions the forestry and wood industry would like the next Scottish Government to take:

1. Create a homegrown timber industrial strategy for Scotland;
2. Meet tree planting targets;
3. Use more homegrown wood in construction;
4. Create a new Scottish Forestry Strategy for a new decade;
5. Develop a forestry and timber skills plan for Scotland.

Introducing the manifesto, Confor CEO Stuart Goodall said the forestry and wood industry can simultaneously deliver on multiple priorities for the next Scottish Government.

He explained: "Building more and better homes, delivering economic growth and new jobs, and tackling climate change, are three of the biggest political priorities for the next Scottish Government. These priorities are often viewed as trade-offs, but Scotland's forestry and timber industry can deliver all three at the same time."

Stuart quoted Sir David Attenborough, who said in his Our Planet series that we need to create new forests to produce more wood.

"Planting more forests with the right trees to increase the supply of Scottish timber will lock up carbon and unlock investment in tree planting, timber processing and manufacturing, stimulating economic growth across Scotland," he stated.

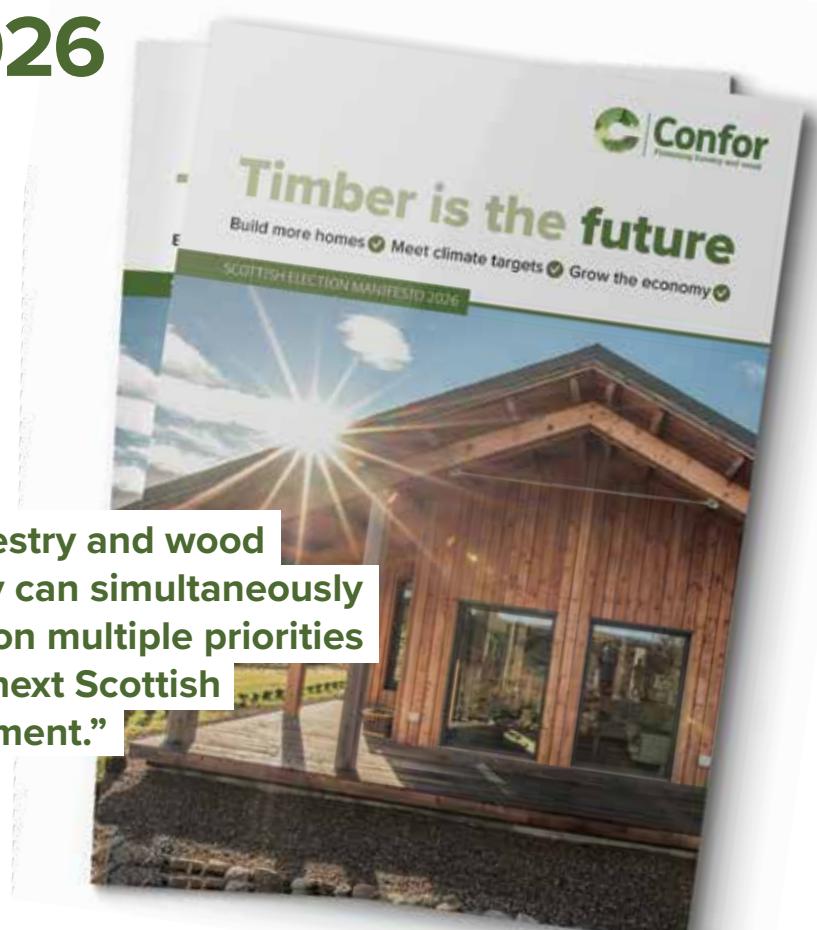
Latest official statistics show that Scotland's forestry and wood industry supports 34,000 jobs and delivers £1.1 billion in annual economic benefit.

"By building on this success, we can help tackle immediate crises in housing, climate and the cost of living, providing jobs and growth in rural areas."

However, he says urgent action is needed to build confidence in the industry to deliver the tree planting and

“

The forestry and wood industry can simultaneously deliver on multiple priorities for the next Scottish Government.”



wood use needed to hit these targets. New planting rates fell back to 8,500 hectares in 2024-25 after a spike up to 15,000 hectares in 2023-24, and Confor urges the next Government to get planting rates back on track, with a target of 18,000 hectares per annum by the end of the decade (as re-stated in the recent Scottish Government Climate Change plan, 2026-2040).

The manifesto calls on the next Government to work with industry on a new homegrown timber industrial strategy to get tree planting targets back on track, promote great use of Scottish timber and attract new skilled people into the industry.

The UK Government and devolved Welsh Government have both adopted timber industrial strategies, and doing this in Scotland too would lay down a clear blueprint for growing, harvesting and using more Scottish timber over the coming decades. The manifesto argues that this would unlock investment and inspire new and emerging products and technologies.

The manifesto also calls for 60%

of all new woodland to be productive forest, containing fast-growing conifers to provide the timber needed to build new homes, and have a greater, faster impact on climate change targets, as conifers soak up carbon dioxide more quickly from the atmosphere.

On housing, the manifesto notes that Scotland is already building more than 90% of new homes using timber frames, but much of this timber is imported. The manifesto says the new Scottish Government should work with industry to set specific targets for the percentage of home-grown timber used in construction. The Scottish Government is also urged to specify that timber should be used as a material of first choice in new public buildings.

Stuart concluded: "Our forestry and wood industry is a modern-day success story. By building on that success, we really can deliver on a range of economic and environmental priorities at the same time. We urge all parties contesting the 2026 election to talk to us about this manifesto and adopt its recommendations."

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A YEAR IN REVIEW: WHAT DOES CONFOR DO FOR YOU?

Membership & Marketing Manager **Eliza Hibbins-Cline**, along with the Confor team, takes a look back at some of our key achievements and outcomes in the past year.

Confor is working for you all year round. These are just a few highlights from 2025, illustrating the real value of your membership.

Meeting members

The 2025 Confor Dinner & Awards, a highlight of the annual industry calendar, took place in February to celebrate forestry leaders, great communicators and inspiring innovators making a difference in the sector.

We also held our annual UK policy conference in November with more speakers than ever before and proactive conversations on securing the timber, investment and workforce needed for the industry's future.

Growing the Industry

Confor successfully lobbied to be included in the new Climate Change Agreement. Continued participation

should save participating sawmills a combined total of £1.5m per annum.

We are now formal partners of the Confederation of Timber Industries (CTI) alongside the Structural Timber Association and TDUK. As a partnership, we successfully convinced the new Labour Government to adopt the Timber in Construction Roadmap 2025.

We are now working closely with Defra and other government departments as the Roadmap's secretariat to deliver key actions including the government ambition to increase productive forestry in England and increase the use of homegrown timber in construction.

If successful, we anticipate demand for C16 sawn timber could increase by over 1 million m³ and panel board by over half a million m³ per annum.

We are working with carcassing sawmill members to support and

promote the Trust UK C16 campaign, launched by BSW Timber, James Jones & Sons and Glennon Brothers in October.

Confor is also working with these sawmills to update the Environmental Product Declaration for kiln dried C16, which it is hoped will demonstrate a significant reduction in embodied fossil carbon and complement the C16 marketing campaign.

As a result of significant effort from the Confor team and others, Confor was delighted to obtain emergency approval from the Chemical Regulation Directorate for the use of Lanzarta for the 2025 season, potentially saving millions of pounds in beat-up costs. We continue to work with partners to press for a more permanent approval.

Political progress

Confor has raised the level of UK ministerial understanding of and



engagement with the industry through various meetings, initiatives and events. We remain involved with the Tree Planting Task Force, which brings together the four governments of the UK in a shared effort to increase levels of woodland creation.

We have facilitated a meeting of UK Forestry Minister Mary Creagh CBE MP with the Investment Forum of the

Industry Leadership Group in January 2026 to discuss roadblocks to private capital for woodland creation and timber production. We have also re-established the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Forestry with a focus this Parliament on Timber Security.

Confor was a key participant in the consultation process leading to the publication of 'Making Wood Work for

Wales', the new Welsh Timber Industrial Strategy. We have called for a similar Strategy to be explored in Scotland and hosted a cross-party event in Edinburgh in partnership with Brodies LLP to garner support.

In preparation for the 2026 Scottish and Welsh General Elections, we have published a Scottish Election Manifesto and look forward to sharing our priorities for Wales in the new year.

Skills & recruitment

Confor has established the Forestry Training Service UK as a subsidiary business and appointed an Operations Director to drive the initiative forward in 2026. The company's operating costs have been underwritten for the next four years by a range of forward-thinking member companies, with additional financial support from the public sector across Great Britain.

Confor has also become a signatory organisation of the Armed Forces Covenant, demonstrating our commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community in transitioning to forestry and timber careers after active service. We partnered with members to deliver multiple taster events for military veterans across England and Scotland this year.

Confor continues to be proactively engaged in skills and recruitment across the UK. We chair the Scottish Skills Group, are active members of the England Skills Forum, chairing the "attraction and retention" sub-group, and are represented on the steering committee for the England Forestry Sector Skills Plan.

Other key workstreams

- Confor continues to provide active support to key industry initiatives such as UKWAS, FISA, Timber Transport Forum and the Hylobious Industry Research Programme.
- We are working to ensure Plant Health issues and concerns are aired and acted on promptly. We are active members of various national groups including the Ips Industry Leadership Group.
- The Trustees of the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund continue to receive a wide range of applications from members wanting to further their education and training.

The full 'Annual Report 2025: What does Confor do for me?' was shared with Members along with subscription invoices for 2025/26. A digital copy may be requested by emailing FTN@confor.org.uk.

Sustaining momentum for UK Forestry and Timber

Confor hosted a Parliamentary drop-in event at the House of Commons, bringing together decisionmakers to discuss the future of UK forestry, timber, and green growth. **Rachael Clamp** reports.

Confor's parliamentary drop-in event on Wednesday 12 November brought strong and growing political interest in the future of UK forestry and timber to the fore, with at least 21 MPs, Ministers and Peers taking part across the afternoon. Hosted by Chris Kane MP, the session offered valuable space for parliamentarians to engage directly with industry leaders on the economic, environmental and national security importance of growing and using more homegrown wood.

The event opened with remarks from Chris Kane MP, who spoke about the strength of the forestry and timber sector in his own constituency and the opportunity presented by increasing the use of UK-grown wood. He highlighted the UK's reliance on imported timber, around 80% of national use, second only to China, and emphasised how home-grown wood can support skilled jobs, create greener homes and build a more sustainable and self-reliant economy.

Chris encouraged colleagues to visit forestry and timber businesses in their constituencies to see first-hand the innovation and pride that characterise the sector, before inviting Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall to speak.

Stuart outlined the industry's central message: that the UK can meet more of its own needs, support rural economies and accelerate carbon reduction if government provides consistency and momentum behind the Timber in Construction Roadmap and offers long-term clarity on productive tree planting.

He emphasised that these issues sit firmly within the wider agenda of economic security, with clear opportunities for growth in skilled jobs, apprenticeships and investment across the country. Stuart also echoed Chris Kane's encouragement for parliamentarians to visit local forestry and timber businesses, reinforcing the sector's capability and readiness to deliver.

Tom Barnes, Managing Director of Vastern Timber, anchored his remarks in the principles set out in the National Wood Strategy for England, emphasising its ongoing relevance to strengthening domestic wood supply. He highlighted how the strategy continues to offer a clear framework for expanding productive forestry, giving processors the long-term confidence needed to invest, and linking forestry policy with housing, planning and wider rural economic opportunity.

Throughout the drop-in,

parliamentarians from all parties engaged with topics ranging from skills and workforce development to planning barriers, supply chain confidence and the role of timber in delivering greener, more affordable homes. Notable attendees included Baroness Young and Toby Perkins MP, both respected for their long-standing interest in forestry, nature and rural growth.

A recurring theme was the strong appetite for constituency visits, with many MPs keen to see forestry operations, sawmills, nurseries and timber construction projects first-hand. Others sought greater clarity on how delivery of the Timber in Construction Roadmap can be accelerated and how the sector's contribution aligns with national goals on housing, planning and the economy.

The final discussion of the afternoon focused on timber security, a theme that has only grown in importance. MPs and Peers reflected on the strategic risks of heavy import reliance and the opportunity to strengthen domestic supply as part of wider national resilience.

Interest in the Forestry and Timber Security APPG was strong, with parliamentarians keen to participate more actively in future sessions and explore how timber security connects to economic stability, rural jobs and resilience planning.

The atmosphere remained constructive throughout, serious in substance but positive in tone, with a shared recognition that government and industry must continue to work closely together to unlock the full potential of UK wood. The event showed that parliamentary momentum is building and that continued engagement remains essential to driving progress.





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Call for Scottish Government to bridge chasm between forestry ambition and reality

Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall and Woodland Trust Scotland Director Alastair Seaman have written to Cabinet Secretary for Finance Shona Robison on behalf of Scotland's leading woodland conservation charity and the leading forestry industry association of the UK.

The Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) administered by Scottish Forestry is the bread and butter of funding for woodland creation and management in Scotland. The sector is still reeling from a 41% (£45.5 million) cut to the grant budget imposed in 2024-25. Even though some of this was reversed, there remains a chasm between targets for woodland creation and delivery.

The Scottish Government's Climate Change plan demands 18,000 hectares of new woodland per year, but the grant pot only stretches to 10,000 hectares.

The joint letter appeals for an



increase in investment in the Forestry Grant Scheme to £70 million in 2026-27, and incrementally to £100 million by the

Relocation of Confor head office

We are pleased to announce that Confor has found a new office space in Edinburgh and officially moved in November. Our new office is located closer to the city centre, with easy access to Edinburgh Waverley train station and other public transport links.

Please make note of the new mailing address: Confederation of Forest Industries UK, 22 LG1 Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1 3LH.

Post directed to our former Argyle House address will be returned to sender from January 2026.

end of the next session of Parliament.

Read the letter in full: <http://bit.ly/WTSletter>.

MEMBER UPDATE

Get the most out of your membership



Eliza Hibbins-Cline,
Membership
& Marketing
Manager

Happy December! I hope you are starting to wind down for the festive break ahead of us. What a year 2025 has been!

A kind thank you to those that continue to support us; your membership of Confor is vital to the work we do and to the future of the industry. If you have any queries regarding your membership renewal, please get in touch with me directly.

I'd like to remind you that if you aren't already part of our online Member Directory, all you need to do is follow these simple steps:

1. Login to our Members Area on confor.org.uk.
2. Click 'Review your (personal) details'.
3. Scroll down to where it says, 'Member Directory details' and click 'Edit Member directory details', then 'add Directory entry'.
4. Fill out your details and submit.

5. Please note your entry will then get submitted to us for approval before being published (this normally takes 1-2 business days).

The Directory is intended to be a valuable addition to the benefits of Confor membership, providing a place for you to promote your services for free. As well as enabling anyone visiting our website to find relevant details on forestry/wood business services, it can also be a great tool to connect with other Members in your local area.

I'd also like to mention that with this issue of the FTN you should have also received your Confor notebook. A big thank you to our sponsors: BSW Timber, Green-tech Ltd, DSHWood and Komatsu Forestry for their support.

You may notice it's a bigger and better version than last year. We hope you find it useful, with all the usual industry information inside. If you have any feedback on future merchandise, please email members@confor.org.uk.

Lastly, I hope you all have a wonderful festive period and a happy new year! See you in 2026!

A warm welcome to our newest members:

England: Ms S Haley, Mr Z Bartlett, Ms J Dennis, Ms M Lily, Woodland Heritage, Ms A Lambert, Miss J Malakhova, Mr R Aaronovitch-Bruce, UK CLT, Mr R Bowen, Mr J Davis, Ms A Reuer, Ms A Robertshaw, Forest and Land Management

Scotland: S. Richardson Contracting Ltd, Buka Forestry Ltd, Mr B Mackay, Colwidhen Asset Management Ltd, Mr D Henderson Howat, Munro Harvesting

Wales: 9Trees CIC, Llandre Sawn Wood Ltd, Mentrau Bach Ltd

Northern Ireland: Mrs H Martin, Mr. J Love

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Nominations open for outstanding contributions to the industry

Confor welcomes you to join your peers, enjoy a meal and raise a glass to the achievements of inspiring people in our industry.

Nominations are open until 12 January for you to tell us who you think should be recognised for their contributions to forestry in the past year.

Go to our website to submit a nomination online or download an entry form: <https://bit.ly/ConforAwards26>

Entries for the Dedicated Service to Forestry Award and the ICF Professional Forester of the Year will also be accepted until their respective January deadline dates.

Our judges are looking for outstanding individuals and businesses with achievements in any of four categories:

Future Leader

The Tom A Bruce-Jones Memorial Award for Future Leader in the Forest Industry. This award is presented to an individual with outstanding skills, who has the potential to be a leader in the forestry and timber sector - someone showing initiative, passion and making a real difference to the sector.

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Championing Forestry & Timber Products

This award is presented to an individual,

business or organisation promoting the forestry and wood sector in a positive, impactful way - through personal engagement, campaigning or communication, social media, or other ways.

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Building Industry Resilience

This award is presented to an individual, business or organisation taking action to futureproof the forestry and wood sector through impactful research, innovative technology development, or skills-building initiatives.

Sponsored by Forestry & Land Scotland and Forestry Commission.

Net Zero Innovation

This award is presented to an individual, business or organisation making a specific and measurable contribution to the forestry and wood industry's efforts to deliver the UK's net zero ambitions.

Sponsored by Tiltill Forestry.

We hope you will join us for this year's celebration of the sector. The 2026 Confor Dinner & Awards returns to Surgeons Quarter, Edinburgh on 11 March 2026, and tickets are available now via our website (<https://bit.ly/ConforEvents>).

If you plan to attend, please ensure you confirm your menu choices by 23 February 2026.

Submit a nomination via the Confor website or download an entry form to enter by email. All submissions must be received by noon on 12 January 2026.

Entry Criteria & Award Information

- All nominees must be currently working in the forestry and wood-using sector.
- You do not have to be a Confor Member to submit a nomination.
- Being nominated or shortlisted in previous years does not prohibit a nominee from being nominated again.
- Judges may, where appropriate, move entries to another category better suited to the nomination submitted.
- Shortlisted nominees will be contacted by Confor after judging has taken place.
- All category shortlists will be announced in the February/March 2026 edition of *Forestry & Timber News*.
- Winners will be announced at the Confor Dinner & Awards 2026.

We are also delighted to confirm that a Confor Member discount is available for rooms at Ten Hill Place Hotel on the night of the event.

Contact the reservations team on 0131 662 2080 or at reservations@tenhillplace.com and quote "CONFOR110326" before 28 January to take advantage of this exclusive rate. Bookings are subject to availability and will be charged at £150 (based on single occupancy bed and breakfast, some accommodations may vary).

From boots to boots

Kate Palmer, Confor Technical & Industry Support Manager, engaged with military leavers discovering new careers in forestry at a recent event and looks forward to further veteran workforce opportunities for the sector.

In early November 2025, Confor welcomed a group of 10 serving personnel and service leavers to Hereford for a dedicated three-day 'Introduction to Forestry for Military Personnel'. Designed in partnership with local members, Forestry England and the Forestry Commission, the event aimed to show how the skills, discipline and mindset developed in military service transfer to modern forestry careers.

A full picture of the sector

The programme combined hands-on visits with structured learning.

Participants toured the Forest of Dean to explore forest recreation, wildlife management and public access. They visited a private estate to learn about woodland planning, operational decision-making and multi-purpose forestry. A trip to Pontrilas Sawmill brought home the scale and sophistication of the processing sector, showing how raw timber becomes the construction and manufacturing material the UK increasingly depends on.

The final day featured sector-wide presentations covering the nursery sector, smaller scale timber processing, timber haulage, and sector professionalism, followed by a networking lunch where service leavers could speak directly with local employers and training providers.

Clear fit between forces skills and forestry needs

What became clear across the three days is that the UK forestry and timber



industry offers a strong match for the strengths service leavers bring:

- Leadership and teamwork
- Working safely in challenging environments
- Fitness, resilience and problem-solving
- Experience operating machinery and equipment
- Ability to follow structured plans and standards

The sector offers something else highly valued by many making the transition out of uniform: a sense of purpose. Forestry allows individuals to contribute to climate resilience, domestic timber security, rural economies and long-term landscape stewardship – whilst often being outdoors.

Confor developing a structured engagement strategy

One important outcome of the Hereford event is the recognition that military engagement should not be left to ad-hoc initiatives. The level of interest from both service leavers and employers demonstrates significant potential to support workforce needs at a time when the sector is expanding woodland creation, tackling climate risks and increasing domestic production.

Confor has recently received Forestry Commission funding to develop a three-year targeted engagement strategy to attract more military leavers, veterans and reservists into forestry careers. The strategy, now in development, will be completed by March 2026 and delivered from 2026-2029.

- It will set out a structured national approach, including:
- clear, tailored messaging that translates military skills into forestry roles;
 - partnership building with CTP,

MISSION, HighGround and MOD networks;

- mapping and promotion of training and entry routes;
- a programme of taster events, outreach activity and employer workshops; and
- an employer toolkit to support recruitment and onboarding of ex-service personnel.

An advisory group drawn from industry, transition services and ex-forces representatives will help ensure the strategy meets the needs of both employers and candidates. The aim is to build a predictable, professionally supported talent pipeline that strengthens the forestry workforce while offering meaningful career pathways for those leaving the armed forces.

Expanding the model: Next stop, Scotland

The strong engagement at Hereford has encouraged Confor and partners to replicate the model elsewhere. The next Introduction to Forestry event is already planned for Elgin in early December, offering Scottish service leavers the same opportunity to explore forestry from seedling to sawmill.

A talent pool forestry cannot ignore

The Hereford event has underlined that the UK's foresters, harvesting contractors, estate managers and processors stand to benefit greatly from tapping into this skilled, motivated community.

For service leavers, forestry represents a purposeful and rewarding second career. For the sector, it represents a chance to strengthen its workforce at a critical moment for UK-grown timber, woodland expansion and climate adaptation.



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Preparing for future threats

Failing to plan for potential threats to plant health is preparing to fail in protecting Scotland's trees, as discussed at a recent Plant & Tree Health Update event chaired by National Manager for Scotland

Richard Hunter.

The Barracks in Stirling was a fantastic venue for the recent plant and tree health update event hosted by Confor. The full day event covered the pests and diseases Scotland is currently facing and considered some of the potential issues of the future. The eight speakers touched on nearly 20 plant health topics, leading to a very full and informative day.

Scottish Forestry, co-designers of the event, kicked the day off with an overview by Barnaby Wylder, Tree Health Operations Manager covering the amount of aerial surveillance that is carried out, and which has identified usual suspects like *Phytophthora ramorum* but also higher levels of Spruce aphid damage, the latter preferring shelterbelts or woodland edges leading to considerable defoliation.

Katy Dainton, Research Entomologist, Forest Research followed with an in-depth review of the damage caused by *Dendroctonus micans* (great spruce bark beetle) and the success

of the *Rhizophagus grandis* breeding programme. The spread of *D. micans* has been slowed considerably by the constant release of *R. grandis*, giving Scotland's spruce trees much more time than once believed.

Jason Sumner-Kalkun, Entomology Response Manager at Forest Research, walked us through England's response to the concerning increase in *Ips typographus* and lessons learnt from Europe, where outbreaks have been seen on massive scale. While not found in Scotland (yet), we should be learning and implementing change where possible to reduce risk. One of the delegates spoke about his experiences as a woodland owner in Austria. Given that *Ips* prefers to attack weakened trees, his advice was to clean up windblow and other potential habitats quickly.

Before lunch (which was excellent), attendees were asked what they consider the highest priorities facing Scotland's tree health now. The highest-ranking current issues were *Hylobius* and *Ips*, with ash dieback and *Xylella fastidiosa* close behind.

These discussions continued through lunch and led nicely into an introduction to the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme, presented by Alistair Yeomans. The forest nursery sector took part in creating the original scheme, aiming to protect themselves and by extension the rest of the industry from imported pests. Currently the England woodland creation offer states that plants must come from a Plant Healthy Nursery.

Confor's Dr Kate Palmer also gave an overview of the work of the *Hylobius* Industry Research Programme (HIRP) who held their own conference earlier this year.

The award for the furthest travelled for the event goes to Diego Salvador Alcalde, Landscape Technical & Biologicals Manager, Syngenta Professional Solutions Europe, who flew in from Spain to talk about his experiences with Pine Processionary Moth and Oak Processionary Moth. Neither are problems yet in Scotland but given their increasing range gives cause to start discussions around management.

UKFS directly refers to visitor safety, and both moths shed hairs that cause quite a nasty skin rash; the sector should be aware of the potential problems.

The warnings didn't end there; Dr Matt Elliot from the Plant Health Centre presented a snapshot of their recent work, including the transmission / transportation of pests via the movement of firewood. These include beetles such as Emerald Ash Borer, Two-Lined Chestnut Borer (which feeds on Oak as well as Sweet Chestnut) and Bronze Birch Borer; all which have caused massive problems in North America and would do very much the same if they arrived on our shores.

Given the UK's dependence on imported timber, is it only a matter of time before they arrive unless we can be proactive and keep them out.

Having heard about biotic pests all day, we finished on abiotic, with final speaker Rubén Manso, Tree and Wood Properties Team Leader, Forest Research, who is researching stem cracking in Sitka spruce i.e. why it accrues and its impact on the value of the tree. Rubén shared how stem cracking could be more common than we think, leading to log rejection at the sawmill. He urged anyone who sees the telltale marks (spiralling cracks) to use the Tree Alert app to record it and thus help with the research.

In summary, a fascinating day for which the feedback so far has been overwhelmingly positive. The takeaway points: be watchful, be bio secure, and use the Tree Alert app to report anything you are not sure of (and watch out for future events such as the Scottish Forest & Wood-based Industries events series in Spring 2026).



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Fire preparedness among hot topics for forestry in Scotland

November brought the Autumn round of the Scottish Forestry & Wood-Based Industries (SFWI) evening events. Held at four locations across Scotland and attracting well over 120 people, Confor's **Richard Hunter** rounds up the highlights.

The Autumn series kicked off in the south of Scotland. Forest Research's Richard Whittet described the various projects that are currently running to improve the yield we receive from our current timber species and covered ideas for future trials, linked to the recently published Future Productive Species List. While a considerable amount of work has been done, there is still more to do.

Kelvin Archer (Head of Forestry, Lowther Estate) outlined the Estate's transition from tenanted farms and clear fell forestry to in-hand, low-impact grazing and continuous cover forestry. The estate is still producing the same volume of timber, but spread across the whole year rather in peaks and troughs.

The use of No Fence collars on the cows helps to prevent over grazing in the estate woodland. While the collars are not perfect, they do offer an opportunity to integrate livestock into forestry.

We also heard an update from Barony College, SRUC's forestry centre, where the student numbers and course types have expanded under the direction of Hugh Morris. Hopefully they will continue to do so and provide much needed new foresters for the sector.

At UHI in Inverness we heard from Uwe Stoneman on the work of the Scottish Land Commission, promoting good community engagement to prevent clashes over land use change. Callum and Iain from Bright Spark Burning Techniques described their experiences of dealing with muirburn, and the Carrbridge and Dava wildfire. The audience had lots of questions on not just the fire but around how the sector can be better prepared in the future.

The final speaker at UHI was Kenny Kortland of Scottish Forestry who gave an update on a range of environmental issues and projects. These included new Capercaille buffer zones and a

soon to be published project covering the amount of biodiversity found in different types of productive and native woodlands.

Falkirk Forth Valley College hosted the Mid Scot event, with an environmental themed evening. Duncan Orr-Ewing spoke with passion about the improvements the Scottish Raptor Monitoring programme has been able to evidence since it started in 2002. The key message that came through was the need for high quality site surveys and communication with local raptor groups early in the planning process to help avoid disruption to both the birds and the sector.

John Bruce of the Low Land Deer

Network followed on the topic of deer numbers and how to improve the annual cull via improving larder access for recreation stalkers. The third speaker was Jack Dunn, one of Tilhill's Forest Ecologists, giving an oversight to his role and how the Chartered Institute of Ecology, Environmental Management fits into the sector.

A standout message concerned bats; how they can use even the smallest of places and we need to have a greater awareness when felling trees with potential roost spots.

The final event of the series was in Inverurie. James Hitchcock from Forest Research gave a brutally honest overview of using satellite data to map



tree species. The technology works and can help to identify pockets of one species hidden in compartments of another that might be difficult to locate from ground surveys. However, the honesty came in the form of Sentinel 2 data that works at 10sqm so is not able to pinpoint individual trees... yet.

The evening was dominated by Steve Conolly's talk on the Carrbridge and Dava fire as it affected forest managed by Steve and his team. This fire has highlighted several aspects that the sector will need to address, including training, fire preparedness and insurance for the crop and staff.

The topic of fire is being addressed by the public sector as well in terms of a review of current guidance and woodland design. But the private sector needs to adapt to fire in modern forestry; we no longer have large numbers of staff to fight fires, but we do have excellent equipment for producing fire breaks and drones for fire monitoring.

The SFWI evening events are free to attend. Confor membership is not required so please pass the word round your contact networks – it would be great to see some new faces attending in 2026. Details and tickets for upcoming events can be found on forestry-scotland.com.



Putting safety first

Confor invited workers from around the forestry industry in Wales to take part in an event discussing current safety issues and priorities. **Elaine Heckley** MICFor, Confor National Manager for Wales, reports.

In October, Confor Wales held its first Forestry Safety Day in collaboration with Natural Resources Wales (NRW), the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) and the Forestry Contracting Association (FCA).

Over 90 people attended from both the public and private sectors. Following a warm welcome from Owen Konig of the FCA, each attendee was asked to answer two questions: describe a near miss you or your team has had or been witness to, and how can we make the industry safer.

These results formed the basis of debate and discussion around the identified themes (see Fig. 1).

The most common issues being brought up seemed to be the public ignoring signage and entering live sites, along with machinery and chainsaw operations, and lone working and poor communication.

Inviting thoughts on how we can make the industry safer, the top 10 actionable recommendations were:

1. Improve communication between teams, contractors, and the public.
2. Increase mandatory training and

3. Foster a culture of openness for near-miss reporting.
4. Better public engagement and signage.
5. Address cost pressures that compromise safety.
6. Invest in supervision and resources.
7. Mandatory FWM, IOSH, and First Aid training for site managers.
8. Create centralised reporting and learning systems for incidents.
9. Promote continuous improvement culture across teams.
10. Increase public awareness campaigns about forestry operations.

The room was full of enthusiasm to address some of these ideas, and I look forward to seeing how the sector in Wales can move forward on some of these points.

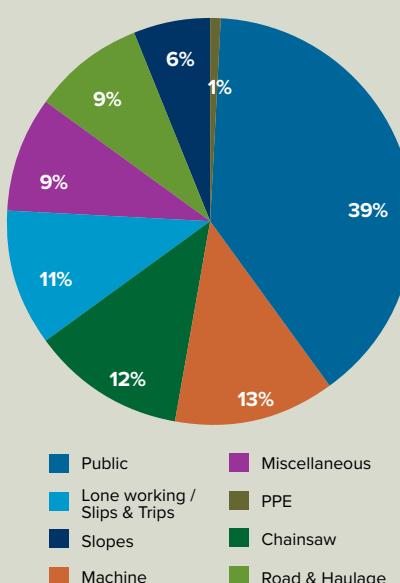
As well as the audience conversations, FISA updated attendees on working group activities and an update on risk zones. Iwan Lloyd Williams and Phil Mostyn of NRW discussed incident investigation, looking at what is expected of an FWM and contractor when investigating an incident.

We also covered emergency planning and explored how and why this is important, as well as mental health and wellbeing.

This was a successful event with a good attendance rate and participation. Going forward, Confor Wales would like to provide an opportunity to learn about and discuss safety issues on an annual basis, involving more private sector foresters and contractors.

We would like to thank our sponsors for this event: Pontrilas Sawmills, John Deere and Natural Resources Wales. Thank you to the FCA and FISA for co-hosting and supporting the event. Thank you also to Iwan Lloyd Williams for helping me organize and run the event, and to Phil Mostyn, StJohn Ashworth, Gillian Clarke and Owen Konig with presenting.

Fig. 1:
Near-Miss & Incident Categories





LOOKING BACK ON 50 YEARS

As we cross into what will be the 50th year of APF, former Chairman **Peter Donnelly** reflects on how the show came to be.

I never thought that I would be here to read about the preparation for APF 50. I expect that there are very few of us alive today who were present at what turned out to be our inaugural event and fewer still who were on the Council at that time.

I had just been elected as Chairman of the Association of Professional Foresters (APF), succeeding Edward Liddon, during whose chairmanship APF had really “started to fly”. He had taken us into the European Federation of Foresters, we had hosted our first overseas visit by the German Foresters Association, the BDF and the Duke of Richmond had become our first President.

At our first meeting under my chairmanship, John McHardy, Head Forester at Longleat and Council member, and Tony Phillips, our Secretary, came up with the idea of holding a forestry demonstration at Longleat. They had

obviously been hashing this idea out for some time and had already obtained the agreement of the Marquess of Bath, who was himself a very keen forester.

They were both concerned that at the various agricultural shows they had attended, all the firms looking forestry equipment merely had trade stands and there were no facilities for actually demonstrating the performance of the equipment they were promoting. Any prospective purchaser therefore had to take that equipment “on trust” from people who frequently had no practical forestry experience.



John and Tony proposed that this event should require “stallholders” to demonstrate any equipment they were promoting and that the facilities should be available in the forest for them to do so. Council endorsed this proposal and Roger Fitter was elected as chairman of the Demo Subcommittee with Tony as its Secretary, plus John, and two or three other Council representatives (including myself) as members.

Tony immediately sent out invitations to any firm with interests in forestry machinery; the response was quite pleasing, and site meetings were arranged.

I still have fond memories of that first event; possibly one of the first, when at almost the last pre-event meeting of the subcommittee I asked “what about toilets” and I still treasure John’s reply: “well, there are plenty of trees in the woods”. We did manage to persuade him that the hoped-for hundreds of visitors disappearing into his woods would be neither environmentally nor socially desirable.

Tentage was found, but even then, sanitary arrangements were to say the least primitive!

I remember on Thursday night sitting up assembling



INCREASE YOUR EXPOSURE AT APF 2026!

The APF Exhibition is the industry's flagship event for the forestry, woodland, arboricultural and fencing sectors. It will take place on 24-26 September 2026 at Ragley Estate, Warwickshire. This will be the Golden anniversary of the show, celebrating 50 years of the APF Demo.

APF 2026 still has some fantastic high profile sponsorship opportunities available. It is the perfect venue to increase your company's profile to the forestry, woodland, arboricultural and fencing sectors. Opportunities exist to suit all budgets as a sole or co-sponsor. Sponsors benefit from exposure at the show, on the APF website, on all APF 2026 advertising, in the show catalogue, and promotion via APF 2026 social media.

Full details can be found in the Sponsorship Opportunities document on the APF website or by emailing the Exhibition Secretary, Ian Millward on info@apfexhibition.co.uk.

programmes which had just arrived from the printers.

Some of the exhibitors had not appreciated that we really did mean that they had to be able to demonstrate



their equipment and turned up in their smart business suits and polished shoes, expecting just to display their wares only.

The Junior Leaders Regiment of the Royal Armoured Corps provided our communications and did an extremely good job.

One of the exhibitors, whose family came from the Indian subcontinent and was demonstrating mobile sawbenches, borrowed an Indian elephant from the estate to move his logs around.

The Skyline delivered an enormous bottle of whiskey to the Marquess of Bath when he officially opened proceedings.

The last night when all had gone home and the organising committee sat in John's house where he, Roger (and I forgot who was the third participant) were sampling a variety of home-made wines which they had all made and brought to the event. My son, who had stayed overnight to help us clear up, also helped in the sampling and slept very well in my caravan that night.

One more memory, my younger daughter persuaded me to retrieve a sort of totem "pole" carved by somebody from Paice Engineering from a log which had succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease. Mr Paice, as he became called, remained with us until she finally retired him last year after 49 years "on guard" in various gardens around the country as we moved. That speaks well

for durability of English elm.

Happy birthday APF and many more to come.

This letter was submitted to the Editor by Peter Donnelly.

Can you help?

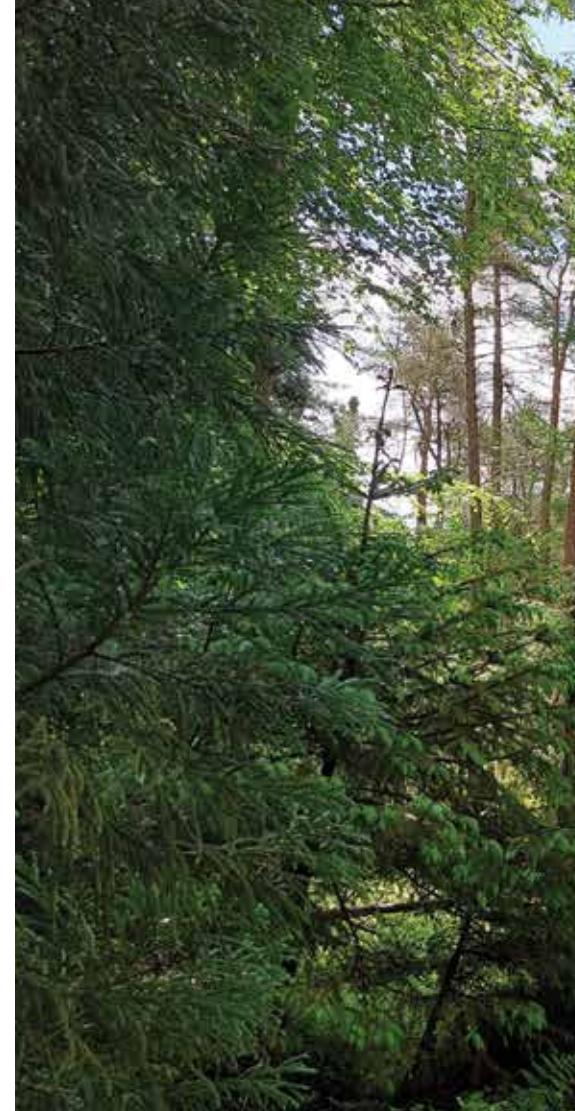
APF 2026 will represent 50 years of the APF Demo since the very first event at Longleat Estate in 1976. APF are planning to have a special exhibition to celebrate the anniversary and to reflect on how forestry has changed over the last 50 years.

Your help is needed. The APF archive has copies of every show catalogue except from Lowther Estate in 1978 and Clumber Park in 1986. If you can provide a copy of either, you may be rewarded with a free ticket to APF 2026!

Also, if you have any old photographs from past APF Demos, especially the early shows, the team would love to see them. Photos of Womba the elephant in 1976 would be an especially exciting find!

Any catalogues or photographs will be copied and returned to you. If you can help, get in touch at info@apfexhibition.co.uk.

Photo credit: Forestry England.



RESILIENT FORESTS, SECURE TIMBER

Forestry England and Confor highlight the link between resilience and long-term timber productivity.

Forestry England has launched its comprehensive Forest Resilience Strategy and Action Plan – a major framework for the nation’s forests they manage, designed to safeguard stable future timber yields whilst protecting against the increasing environmental risks posed by climate change, pests and disease.

The strategy sets out a proactive approach to managing risk across the nation’s forests, combining decades of scientific research and operational experience under three core principles: Assess, Diversify and Restore. It aims to ensure that the forests in Forestry England’s care remain healthy, adaptive and sustainable for generations to come.

Dr Eleanor Tew, Head of Forest Planning at Forestry England, said the new framework reflects the organisation’s commitment to taking early, science-based action to strengthen the resilience of the nation’s forests.

“The Forest Resilience Strategy brings together our best evidence and experience to prepare for the challenges ahead,” she stated. “By acting now, we can help ensure that the nation’s forests continue to thrive and deliver benefits for people, nature and the economy.”

Confor has welcomed the publication of Forestry England’s new resilience strategy, recognising the importance of planning for the long-term health of the nation’s forests in the face of growing environmental pressures.

As the producer of around 40% of England’s home-grown timber, Forestry England’s approach will have a direct bearing on the success of the Government’s Timber in Construction Roadmap (TiCR) and the stability of the domestic timber supply chain. This is crucial to maintaining the confidence of the wider sector, including harvesting contractors, wood processors and investors.

“We fully support Forestry England’s proactive focus on resilience,” said John Bruce, Confor’s National Manager for England. “The strategy provides important reassurance that the nation’s forests are being managed with the long-term supply of timber in mind. Our members welcome this and recognise the scale of the challenge involved.”

Commitment to sustainable timber production

In setting out the new strategy, Forestry England highlighted to Confor the continuing importance of timber to the nation’s forests, saying:

“The nation’s forests currently contribute around 40% of England’s total wood supply to market, whilst delivering a huge diversity of other essential environmental and social benefits. Our productive capacity remains strong, and we are committed to maximising timber output within sustainable parameters.”

Confor said this statement offers welcome reassurance that productive forestry remains integral to resilience and plays a central role in delivering the TiCR. The organisation noted that maintaining this visibility publicly will help build confidence in the future of home-grown timber and the contribution of Forestry England’s forests to the UK’s low-carbon economy.



Photo credit: Forestry England.

Protecting future supply

Forestry England has reiterated that sustainable timber production remains a key outcome of its approach to forest resilience, stating:

"We remain committed to optimising sustainable timber production for the sector. Our approach to forest resilience is designed to protect and stabilise long-term availability. By building forest resilience now, we aim to prevent supply disruptions and market volatility that would result from a sudden, large-scale decline in forest productivity."

Forestry England noted that predicting future timber volumes remains challenging because of the many environmental and market variables involved. The organisation continues to work closely with Forest Research to refine production forecasts and has commissioned bespoke scenario modelling to assess how different management approaches and conditions might affect future timber availability.

"This research will continue to inform our management decisions," said Dr Tew. "By basing our actions on the best available science, we can help secure the forests' ability to deliver timber and a wide range of other benefits for generations to come."

Confor welcomed this evidence-based approach, noting that close

collaboration with Forest Research will be crucial in giving the wider sector confidence that productive forestry can remain both sustainable and adaptable.

"That's an important message for industry," John Bruce said. "Resilience and productivity must be seen as part of the same equation. Building resilience strengthens timber security - it doesn't weaken it."

Ensuring resilience and productivity go hand-in-hand

Confor's review of the strategy recognises its strong focus on biodiversity and adaptation, but stresses that greater visibility of timber and productive forestry within the resilience narrative would help underline the sector's contribution to economic growth and climate targets.

"Forestry England's leadership is crucial," John added. "As the largest supplier of home-grown timber in England, its management choices directly influence the future strength of the UK's low-carbon economy."

"We want to see continued emphasis on species that can deliver timber for construction - building on the proven success of Sitka spruce and developing complementary alternatives."

Confor noted that the strategy clearly supports many of the aims of

the National Wood Strategy for England and the TiCR. These connections offer a valuable opportunity to highlight how forest resilience, future timber supply and low-carbon construction are interlinked, helping to demonstrate the role of sustainable forest management in achieving national climate and housing goals.

Aligning Forestry England's resilience and planning work with the 50-year national timber forecast, Confor said, would provide additional reassurance to processors and investors about the continuity of domestic supply.

A shared message for the sector

The *Forest Resilience Strategy and Action Plan* will now guide Forestry England's operational decisions across the nation's forests. Confor will continue to engage through the Forestry England Liaison Group, supporting implementation and ensuring that the strategy's ambition for resilient, diverse forests remains firmly linked to the nation's timber security and economic resilience.

"Resilient forests deliver for people, nature, climate and the economy," John concluded. "Forestry England's new strategy is an important step in ensuring that the forests we rely on today continue to provide for future generations."

Futureproofing forestry in Wales

Following on from the publication of the Welsh Timber Industrial Strategy, woodland expansion and research into resilience has been announced by Welsh Government.

A new research programme to identify a shortlist of productive tree species, suited to both current and predicted future climatic conditions in Wales, has been given the go ahead.

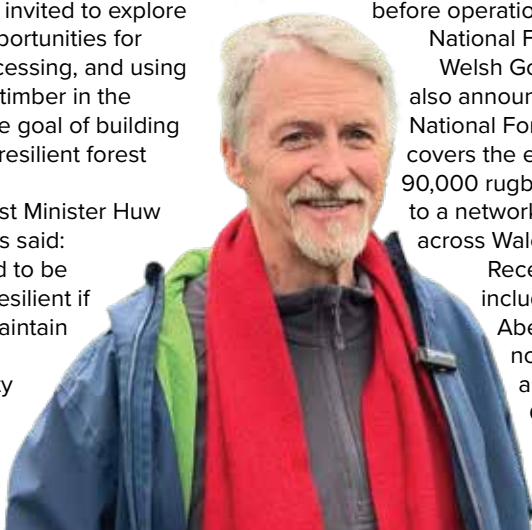
The need for such research has been highlighted by Welsh Government's recently published Timber Industrial Strategy, 'Making Wood Work for Wales', and similar work in Scotland and England. A key focus of the Wales programme will be research into wood properties and market development.

Woodknowledge Wales, Bangor University and Edinburgh Napier University will work with Forest Research to develop the shortlist.

People from all parts of the forestry sector will be invited to explore ideas and opportunities for growing, processing, and using home-grown timber in the future with the goal of building a strong and resilient forest industry.

Deputy First Minister Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"Forests need to be healthy and resilient if they are to maintain and enhance their capability to produce timber, provide high-quality habitats



for wildlife and continue to deliver for society.

"We need to future-proof our forests, suitably adapting to climate change, introducing greater diversity and appropriate species mixes for future resilience. The launch of this project is an important step to enable forward planning, vital given the relatively long-term cycles involved in ensuring Wales has access to genetically diverse and climate-appropriate stock to plant sustainable forests for future generations."

Species on the Welsh shortlist will be those considered suitable for deployment now, while an additional reserve list will identify promising species that require further research before operational use.

National Forest expansion

Welsh Government have also announced that the National Forest for Wales now covers the equivalent of over 90,000 rugby pitches, thanks to a network of woodland sites across Wales.

Recent additions include two new sites: Aberduna Hall in north-east Wales and Castle Wood in Carmarthenshire, adding 24 hectares between them. Other expansions include another

CHANGES COMING IN 2026

Following the election due in May 2026, there will likely be more parties in the Senedd and more than half of the MSs will be new. This will look like:

- 96 members instead of 60
- Wales will be divided into 16 new constituencies instead of 40
- A new voting system will include everyone aged 16 years and over
- Anyone standing for election must live in Wales
- Elections will now be every four years

It is expected that no one party will achieve a majority in the Senedd, and at the time of printing polls were showing the following order of popularity: Plaid Cymru, Reform, Labour, Greens, Conservatives and then Liberal Democrats.

Confor will be looking to engage with new Members of the Senedd and educate.

20,000+ hectares of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate.

Deputy First Minister Huw Irranca-Davies commented: "90,000 hectares is a huge milestone for the National Forest for Wales on our journey towards creating a forest that extends from north to south."



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BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FROM SCOTLAND'S WEST COAST

With an impressive £18m factory newly opened in the west of Scotland, Alexanders Timber Design is looking to the future.

Eleanor O'Neill reports on the evolution of the business.

Alexanders Timber Design Ltd made headlines earlier this year with the official opening of its cutting edge, high-tech manufacturing facility in Irvine. It marked a £18m investment in the business and in the future of building homes with sustainable Scottish timber.

Under the umbrella of Glennon Brothers since 2008, Alexanders Timber Design has been assembling quality timber frames and roof trusses since 1990, making use of the local timber supply chain.

"Alexanders Timber Design was formed from within a company called Alexander Sawmills," explained Jim Patterson, Head of Timber Frame. "It was originally set up to service one-off clients like Mr and Mrs Smith, building their own house. They had a range of around 10

house types, and that was what they sold.

"When we started in the 1990s, we were manufacturing two or three kits a week at most. It was a very small business. Now we are targeting up to 50 going out the gate every week."

Jim has seen significant change and growth since joining the company in 2000. In 2006, Alexanders Timber Design moved from their original site to a new facility directly across the road from the Adam Wilson & Sons sawmill in Troon, their main supplier and owned by the same parent company.



Alex Murray, Jim Patterson, John Swinney MSP, Pat Glennon & Mike Glennon.



The current factory is located in Irvine just six miles away from Glennon Brothers sawmill in Troon. It combines advanced Kuka robots with precision engineering to assemble closed frame timber panels, which incorporate insulation and other features, making installation even easier at their final destination.

"We bought an existing empty factory, stripped it back to the steel frame, and refurbished the entire facility," said Jim. "New walls, new roof, built new offices, even the yard – it's all as near to brand new as you can get."

"The automated wall line is 160 metres long. There are eight robots on it carrying out various applications on the timber frame. At the time of commissioning, it was the most advanced automated timber frame plant in the UK."

New practices and products can create their own hurdles, however. Particularly when you have an established business model selling the same thing to the same people.

For many years our standard product has been open panel timber frame, as is the vast majority of what's being built in Scotland at the moment. Looking to the future we see factory insulated closed panels becoming the new standard product in the UK and have equipped our new factory to accommodate this requirement.

"The biggest challenge we have at the minute is changing the mindset of



our customers to consider the alternative product. Most volume builders in Scotland build the same way, open panel timber frame with subcontract labour to insulate, attach an airtight membrane and fit service battens on site.

"That's been a successful system for these companies for many years. One of our longest established customers, Ashleigh Construction, has been building quality homes using variations of this tried and tested process for over 25 years.

One of the major advantages, beyond saving installation costs further down the line, is that the inner components of our closed panels are installed entirely under the cover of the factory, rather than being at the mercy of the Scottish weather once they reach the building site.

"At first glance the price difference between open and closed panel can look significant," Jim admitted. "When you start breaking down what's included, we estimate it's cost neutral for the customer with the added advantage of time savings on site of up to one week per plot. We now have a few companies using our closed panel product, it is now our job to promote this excellent product to more and more of our current and future customers."

"Everybody is keen to talk about it. They know it's coming, they know it's the future. Skilled labour is getting more and more difficult to find so, if you can carry out four or five processes which would normally be performed on site and pre fit the materials in a factory instead, why wouldn't you?"

The slow but steady adoption of closed frame is likely also owed in part to the professional and local relationships Alexanders Timber Design has built

over the years. Despite the expansion and changing of the guard, they still very much consider themselves a family business, building Scottish homes from Scottish timber.

Jim said: "We're still family owned, and we still retain that family business feel. Our business is built on people and relationships with a level of customer service we are very proud of.

"We have a unique sustainability story to tell that few can replicate. Most of the material for our frames comes from forests within a 60 to 70 mile radius of our factory. It's homegrown timber processed at our parent company Glennon Brothers Troon sawmill. They process the logs into sawn timber, they then dry the timber, grade the material, machine it, treat it, then deliver it to us to build homes from it. Waste material from the processing is then used to create electricity to power the sawmill and produce heat for the kilns which dry the timber."

"Most of our customers are within 50 or 60 miles of the factory. People talk a lot now about sustainability and a circular economy. Not many could beat taking the raw form of a log to the full structure of a house inside a 70-mile radius."

With all that said, Jim expressed ambitions for Alexanders Timber Design that reach beyond the border.

"We feel the area of the UK with the greatest growth potential for timber frame is in England. Over 90% of the new homes being built in Scotland utilise timber frame construction, with England currently using timber frame in around 12% of new homes being built, the opportunity for Alexanders Timber Design and homegrown timber is phenomenal."



The Forestry Regulation Task Force – Where are we now?

David Atkinson MICFor, Senior Forest Manager for **Edwin Thompson**, takes a look at how recommendations for cutting red tape nearly 15 years ago measure up to the realities of forestry today.

Forestry, like many sectors, is facing a difficult period. High inflation, increased wages, rising costs, changes to inheritance tax, higher interest rates, declining incomes, and an uncertain and consolidating timber market all make an impact on woodland owners.

There is a sense that doing business continues to get harder and slower with regulation an ever-increasing barrier. Against this backdrop, it is worth reflecting on the Forestry Regulation Task Force initiative, now nearly 15 years old.

The Task Force was set up by the newly formed coalition Government as part of a series of attempts to cut red tape and make doing business better. Co-ordinated through Confor and an industry-based steering panel, Chris Starr led and authored a report in 2011, containing 600

suggestions to improve regulation – a number which in itself was indicative of the challenge.

The intention was to make it easier for the sector to:

- Ensure jobs are protected and businesses flourish.
 - Bring some 600,000ha of under-managed woodland into active management.
 - Halt the loss of ancient woodland and conserve ancient and veteran trees.
 - Create new woodland in appropriate locations.
 - Help restore business confidence in managing forests.
 - Work within a regulatory environment that rewards good behaviour.
 - Reverse the loss of biodiversity from lack of management.
 - Access grants and other related mechanisms to achieve the above.
- The Task Force would also suggest how it might be possible to:
- Ensure that good practice benefits from a reduced burden of regulation.
 - Reward those who seek to 'do the right thing'.
 - Retain, and if necessary increase, regulation to deter bad practice.

This was to be achieved within a political and public sector environment

where resources were constrained by the deficit reduction strategy, Government expected greater involvement by the private sector, and partnerships were encouraged

All of the above remain laudable objectives and arguably government resources are more constrained today. It is also clear that what were then fledgling initiatives around carbon and biomass have come a long way.

The report clearly had some preoccupations that now seem redundant. The setting up of "a new partnership" to take on some of the Forestry Commission (FC) advisory and regulatory work would seem to reflect the aborted attempt to privatisate FC. Earned recognition leading to streamlined grants and licence applications is a well flown kite but one never likely to land.

Other suggestions such as linking grants to management plans have become a reality, though in so slow and complicated a manner that any benefits have been lost. It should be noted that the review recommended different types of plans relevant to size and scale of woodlands; a common sense approach that is very much needed today.

There were recommendations that the Government should have a web-

based resource and make all forms electronically available. We cannot deny that this has come to pass but the plethora of forms, pre-applications, species application plans, species plans, woodland creation plans, monitoring forms and so on was surely not the nirvana envisaged.

However, we should note that the online felling licence system in England is a rare example of a simple system that does work well.

There was a recommendation to streamline and make the UKFS more accessible and succinct. At the time the UKFS was a single slim A4 volume but soon expanded into a multi-volume epic.

The Task Force recommended streamlining the process of registering land with the Rural Payment Agency to make applications easier. This type of system is now at the heart of all grant applications in each country but has brought a whole raft of complexity where schemes overlap and EWCO sits outside the process.

The Task Force considered the impact of Habitats Regulations and noted they were “deterring active woodland management”, recommending “more resources are devoted to establishing a sound evidence base for determining to what degree approved woodland management activities affect European Protected Species”. Habitat regulations and associated guidance have since ballooned and are now the major obstacle to woodland creation across the country. A review is long overdue.

The examples above are but a few and all areas one thing is clear. Regulation has increased, driven by the paradigm of “Precautionary Principle”. In a UK plagued with declining productivity, forestry is another shining example of how to do less, with more and to do it more slowly. No fewer than nine sequential governments supposedly committed to and enacting policies of deregulation oversaw a relentless increase in regulatory complexity. Even Brexit failed to stem the surge.

Now more than ever we need to pick up the work of Regulation Task Force and to re-examine what works and what doesn't, to try to achieve more with less, and do it swiftly. The report needs to be dusted down and presented to our latest Forestry Ministers; we need governments and government organisations to get serious about getting things done.

See ‘*Challenging Assumptions, Changing Perceptions: A Report by the Forestry Regulation Taskforce*’ (2011): <https://bit.ly/ForestTaskforce>



First trees planted in landmark step towards creating new Western Forest

A major milestone towards creating the UK's first new national forest in more than three decades is underway as the first trees are planted in the new Pucklechurch Wood, part of the Western Forest, which is working with partners and communities to increase trees and woodlands from the Cotswolds to the Mendips.

Located on South Gloucestershire Council-owned land, the 30-hectare Pucklechurch site – equivalent to around 42 football pitches – lays the foundation for a future woodland which will evolve into a vibrant green space for people and nature for generations to come.

Between the end of November 2025 and March 2026, 22,000 native and climate-resilient trees will be planted by volunteers, with a further 22,000 the following November to March. In 10-15 years, the young trees will be recognisable woodland, with some trees reaching up to 10 metres in height.

Tree species were carefully selected to ensure climate resilience, combining native trees like the English oak, with a small range of non-native species including sweet chestnut that can withstand warmer, drier conditions.

Councillor Louise Harris, South Gloucestershire Council's cabinet member for the climate and nature

emergency, said: “Pucklechurch Wood will be the largest new woodland ever planted on South Gloucestershire Council owned land. This will be a flagship project for our work to increase the area's tree canopy cover, restore nature, and build community resilience for generations to come.

“The Western Forest offers an ambitious vision and we're proud to be playing our part in bringing it to life.”

Pucklechurch Wood is being created thanks to South Gloucestershire Council providing the land, the Government's Trees for Climate funding through the Forest of Avon, and funding from Pucklechurch Parish Council. The site will be managed by South Gloucestershire Council, supported by Pucklechurch Parish Council, the Forest of Avon and volunteers.

Pond and wetland scrape features will be integral to the new woodland, thanks to funding from West of England Combined Authority (WECA) as part of the Common Connections project.

The UK's new Western Forest is planned to stretch across Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and the West of England (Bristol, Bath & NE Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset). It aims to restore and connect wildlife and habitats whilst creating new opportunities for communities and the economy.



SELECTIVE BUT STEADY INTEREST CLOSING OUT THE YEAR

There are plenty of reasons for optimism in 2026's forest market, according to **Jack Clegg MRICS**, Director, Tustins Group Ltd.

I began drafting our south of the border focussed contribution to the regular market report in mid-November, during a period of heightened uncertainty driven largely by anticipation surrounding the recent Autumn Budget. For several months, stakeholders across the sector had been speculating and waiting cautiously to see what measures Rachel

Reeves might introduce, and how these could influence their businesses or woodland ownership going forward.

Although this prolonged period of fiscal speculation has understandably resulted in a slowdown in market activity, I am pleased to report that clear interest remains from both buyers and seller, though investors are now exercising greater selectivity in their searches,

perhaps focussing on properties offering more immediate production potential.

Tustins Group Ltd has brought a number of properties to the market in recent months, ranging from larger commercial holdings to smaller amenity woodlands, and from planting land to recently established plantations. Among these is Edder Acres Woodlands in County Durham, a mixed plantation extending to 71 hectares and established in 2023. Guided at £1.25 million, it is supported by registered carbon credits and annual maintenance payments, a rare and compelling offering in the current market.

Other recent launches include Selattyn Woods in Shropshire, three predominantly Sitka spruce plantations totalling 44 hectares and guided at £585,000; Pen-y-Ffrith in Denbighshire, a late-rotation Sitka plantation extending to 72 hectares and guided at £1.045 million; and The Neuadd in Powys, an 18-hectare mixed-age conifer woodland on the market at £250,000.

Beyond our own listings, the wider market has also been active. Notable examples include Shotley Estate Woodlands in Northumberland, 218 hectares of commercial forestry brought to the market by Savills at a guide price of £3.53 million, as well as Bryn y Maen



Woodland in Conwy County, a mixed conifer holding launched by Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group with offers invited over £350,000.

Turning to completed and agreed sales, activity has also remained steady. Significant transactions include completions on Snaizeholme and High Houses Forests, 110 hectares of Sitka spruce guided at approximately £1 million and sold off-market; Maescoch Plantation, 18 hectares of mature Sitka spruce guided at £360,000; Colemans Wood, a 17-hectare broadleaf woodland guided at £390,000; and 25 hectares of mixed conifer and broadleaf woodland in Buckinghamshire, also completed off-market.

Several agreements have recently been reached as well, including Bainloch Hill Forest in Dumfries and Galloway (138 hectares, guided at £1.6 million), Cryniarth in Powys (73 hectares, guided at £1.2

million), Bryn Wichell in Ceredigion (15 hectares, guided at £270,000), Beacon Hill Wood in Herefordshire (27 hectares, guided at £475,000), and a high-quality Sitka spruce plantation in North Yorkshire (guided at £1.45 million and agreed off-market).

Collectively, this activity demonstrates that there is still ample choice, opportunity and across all price points and whilst the softening of timber prices seen through much of 2025 has persisted, it has not materially damped market momentum.

Recent industry insight was also provided by the Tiltill Forestry and Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group UK Forest Market Report (1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025), which highlighted several key trends. The total value of the commercial forestry market reached £140 million, supported by a 50% uplift in new listings.

A total of 9,200 hectares came to the market, 70% more than in 2024, while the average price per stocked hectare rose by 3% to £19,200. Mixed woodland listings were more subdued, falling by 40% to £11 million, and there was a noted decline in sales of land with commercial planting potential.

As always, interpreting these figures is challenging given the quantum of off-market transactions each year. Nonetheless, the conclusions mirror those reflected in our own activity – buyers are more cautious and selective, but appetite remains strong when the right property becomes available.

Finishing this report in late November, I now find myself reflecting on—rather than awaiting—the Autumn Budget which, as anticipated, contained little that is expected to directly affect the forestry market moving forward. No further changes to Inheritance Tax or Capital Gains Tax were introduced, such as those introduced last Autumn, and while some measures may feature in buyers' investment considerations, none appear likely to materially influence market behaviour.

In conclusion, recent activity demonstrates that the market remains resilient and engaged. Although the run-up to Christmas typically brings a natural slowdown, the pre-Budget tension, along with the many doom-laden predictions of tax rises that ultimately did not materialise, has now largely faded. As a result, the market is expected to strengthen further, and we remain optimistic for a positive start to 2026.

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Future of land use to be defined by integrated forestry and farming

Farmers and foresters may not be in the same boat, but they are in the same storm, said forestry experts at the launch of the Tilhill Forestry/Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group UK Forest Market Report 2025.

Communication and collaboration on land use are key as forestry and farming face “common uncertainties”, according to The UK Forest Market Report 2025 produced by BSW Group’s Tilhill Forestry and Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group.

The report, which showed a 50% uplift in commercial forestry listings in the past year, was launched in Edinburgh on 18 November and London on 19 November. The annual publication is considered the most comprehensive overview of the UK forestry sector, detailing key financial trends, regional insights and analysis of the timber and natural capital markets.

This year, the report called on “forestry to support farming and farming to support forestry” and for the two sectors to work together to sustain the communities, landscapes and livelihoods that depend on them.

Xander Mahony, Head of Forestry Investment for Tilhill Forestry, said: “Forestry and farming have often been slightly uncomfortable bedfellows in the rural space. Today, there are perhaps more pressing shared challenges than the relatively minor skirmishes between us.”

The data

The report estimates the total value of the commercial forestry market to be £140million in 2025. This is lower than the listings from 2020 to 2023 which reached around £200m each year but is 50% higher than 2024.

A total of 9,200ha were listed on the market, 70% up on 2024 with just four listings accounting for half of the total area. The average price per stocked hectare was £19,200, up 3%.

Two exceptionally large landholdings



Group photo LtR: Will Anderson (Seafield and Strathspey Estates), Xander Mahony (Tilhill Forestry), Rebecca Wilson, Jon Lambert (Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group) & Norman Murray (Grant Woodlands Partnership)

– Griffin in Perthshire (4,000ha) and the Caledonian Portfolio (over 2,000ha across 15 forests) – have been excluded from the pricing data in order to provide a more realistic picture of the market.

Mixed woodland listings were subdued, down 40% to just £11m. Properties were about 20% smaller than in recent years with an average value of £380k and an average size of 30ha. The value rose 3% to £16,200/ha in England, 6% to £13,700/ha in Wales and 16% to £10,200/ha in Scotland.

Sales of land with commercial forestry planting potential were relatively scarce. In Scotland, the price continued to fall and ranged from £7,000 to £11,000/ha. Values in England (£15,000/ha) and Wales (£15,000 to £16,000/ha) were stable, partly due to higher land grades being sold for planting south of the border.

The market

Jon Lambert, Partner at Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group, commented: “The commercial forestry market is evolving. 2025 was marked by a shift in the age of forests coming to the market, caution among buyers and variations in sale success.”

He said many more young crops changed hands this year, often where original planting sites had been harvested and restocked. Some sites comprised trees less than 10 years old, the result of woodland creation schemes and some offering carbon credits.

The market was characterised by “caution and selectiveness” which “has moulded an unusual collection of sale results”.

Jon emphasised that forestry, like any property, is a long-term game and remained a “strongly performing investment asset class”.

Collaboration on land use

Writing in the report, Rebecca Wilson, a fifth-generation farmer named in the Sunday Times Young Power List 2025, said: “The UK is not a large country, yet our land is being asked to do more and more. We need it for food production, trees, housing, renewable energy, biodiversity, and carbon storage.”

She stressed the need for clear communication and respect for the deep-rooted emotional connection farmers have to the landscape.

“Farming and forestry both have a role to play in tackling climate change, delivering biodiversity, and supporting rural economies. The danger lies in treating them as competing land uses, when in reality there is an opportunity for them to complement each other.”

“Both sectors are long-term stewards of land, tied in with climate, nature, and rural economies. If they work against each other, opportunities will be lost. If they work together, the benefits could be substantial.”

“The future of land use in the UK will be defined not by choosing between trees and food, but by finding ways to integrate them.”

GAINING AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

More than 60 women from 14 countries came together in Reykjavík, Iceland for the third annual Women in Forestry (WOFO) International Conference.

Elaine Heckley MICFor was among them, thanks to support from the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund.

Women are underrepresented in our sector, and I know I can often feel isolated in terms of gender and diversity. Gender and diversity is my pet subject and I do enjoy exploring how we, as a sector, can become more inclusive and open to letting people in from diverse backgrounds.

It is an important undertaking if we want to grow our industry to be resilient, and to gain greater support and understanding.

I was intrigued to reach out across international forestry and see if there were support systems, strategies and common issues or solutions that I could bring home to the UK.

The WOFO Conference, 'Growing Together: Women, Forests, and a Sustainable Future', took place in Reykjavík, Iceland on 10-11 October 2025.

I was so intrigued, and since doing GCSE geography I have wanted to go to Iceland and explore their natural environment. I didn't think there was much of a forestry industry and was very excited to learn more and see what parallels I could draw with what we have in the UK.

Without the support of the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund (FIEPF), I would not have had this opportunity, and I thank them for making it possible for me to attend the conference. There are quite a few bursaries floating around the sector, which I applaud but have always thought "they'll never accept me".

Having now benefitted from the FIEPF, I would encourage more people to apply, push themselves outside of their comfort zone, and engage with opportunities to learn, develop and get involved.

After spending the first day of the conference staying inside in Reykjavík to hear from speakers and network, we went out on the following day to see Iceland's forestry, including examples of the small but growing timber industry. The Þingvellir National Park in particular was beautiful.

What emerged from the discussions we had were the strengths that women can bring into the industry. We tend to be more socially engaged, to make connections more easily, and to collect and share information.

Internationally, we are heading towards a global warming crisis and significant climate change; this is the



biggest threat to mankind and perhaps bringing women to the forefront, into the room, could help break down barriers to solutions.

The idea of WOFO is to connect women across countries to reduce isolation and the movement is getting bigger. Our sector needs every brain we can get - and 50% of the population is often missing from the conversation.

It was great to have the opportunity to zoom out of the UK and look at inequality internationally. I learnt that the current gender split of forestry graduates is 58% men and 42% women. The International Forestry Students Association (IFSA) recently sent out an open letter calling for gender equality in forestry education and a gender aware learning environment.



Improving the international image of forestry education is important to achieve this. One solution may be for countries to appoint forestry ambassadors to promote the sector, be mentors, and form a network to support women in the industry.

An existing resource is the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Forestry-related sectors (ForGEDI) platform. This is aimed at all levels of the sector (students, educators and professionals) and includes 15 hours of learning in a free online course. Thus far, 2,183 learners have completed the training with the aim of supporting marginalized groups and addressing issues that arise from power imbalances in our sector.

According to World Economic Forum,

Iceland has been the most gender-equal society in the world for the last 16 years. As noted at the conference, the full picture is more complicated. For example, the parental leave for men helps push up the statistics but the income for women post-childbirth falls by 36. As a society, we need to look into hidden barriers like these and how we can close the gap.

The main takeaway I got from my two days in Iceland was that we need to remember the forest is not just products - it holds many social benefits. We need to start forestry education from childhood; we need to see everyone represented in the sector; we need to break down and understand the mental load carried by workers; we need to explore role models and

ambassadors within the sector; we need to be better storytellers and come out of our silos.

This event was a fantastic springboard to start that journey.

Attendees all made a promise to make a change in the forestry sector. At the next International WOFO Conference in Austria in April 2026, they plan to present best practices, pilot activities and look at what else is needed to drive further change. I am looking forward to seeing what I can do in the UK to promote our story within the WOFO community.

A big thank you to the local organisers – Ragnhildur Freysteinsdóttir from Skógarkonur and the Icelandic Forestry Association - along with FIEPF for enabling me to access this training.

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Reaching new heights

Alexandra Reuer brings new meaning to the phrase 'UPskilling' with a tree climbing qualification, made possible by the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund.

Having decided to retrain as an arborist in my early 40s, I was lucky enough to be accepted on a Level 4 Arboriculture Diploma course in September 2024. Since then, it has been fascinating to learn all about trees, their biology, physiology and associated habitats, and to gain valuable woodland management skills.

Once I had completed my basic chainsaw tickets, I was looking around for ways to attain the City & Guilds Tree Climbing & Aerial Rescue qualification, to get me one step closer to my goal of working in tree surveying and habitat creation. I applied to the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund (FIEPF) and was delighted to be awarded a bursary for a five-day tree climbing course.

The course took place in Devon in early November 2025 and was an absolutely brilliant experience. After covering the relevant health & safety regulations and other applicable legislation, we were taken through the basics of how to conduct a visual tree assessment (VTA) and how to safely ascend into a tree on two ropes using the moving rope technique (MRT).

Over the course of the week, we learnt over half a dozen knots and hitches, practised rope throwing, branch walking, foot locking and spiking, and



rescued each other and our casualty dummy 'Jeff' out of trees and from a pole. After a week of tree climbing in all weathers, I realised with great relief that I had in fact chosen the right career!

With my sights set firmly on habitat creation and a strong interest in tree veteranisation, my next step will be

the 'Using a chainsaw from a rope and harness' qualification to fully equip me for this type of work.

My thanks to the Education Fund for helping me move forward on this career path, through which I hope to contribute to maintaining and restoring important woodland ecosystems.

ABOUT THE FOREST INDUSTRIES EDUCATION AND PROVIDENT FUND

The Education Fund supports career development for Confor members. Applicants can be individuals or companies, they must present clear reasons for doing the course, show how it will further their careers, and provide some background information.

Applicants can be at any stage in their careers and can pursue a wide

range of training including attendance at conferences, participation on specialist courses, management skills or practical training.

Trustees are also interested in requests to co-fund with other bodies as this may broaden the scope of training opportunities available.

Awards can only be offered prior to training. It generally takes about three

weeks to process an application, with offers of up to £1,000 per application. For more details and an application form, visit the Confor website.

The Provident Fund is available in cases of hardship, for example long-term illness, personal injury or death. It has more flexibility, and all applications are treated in confidence by the Trustees.

Learning to manage risk

Looking to expand his knowledge base and career prospects, James Love sought support from the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund to undertake risk assessment training.

With over a decade of hands-on experience in the Tree Maintenance industry, with roles ranging from Groundsman to Timber Truck Operator to Climber, both in the UK and Australia, I had reached a crossroads in my career.

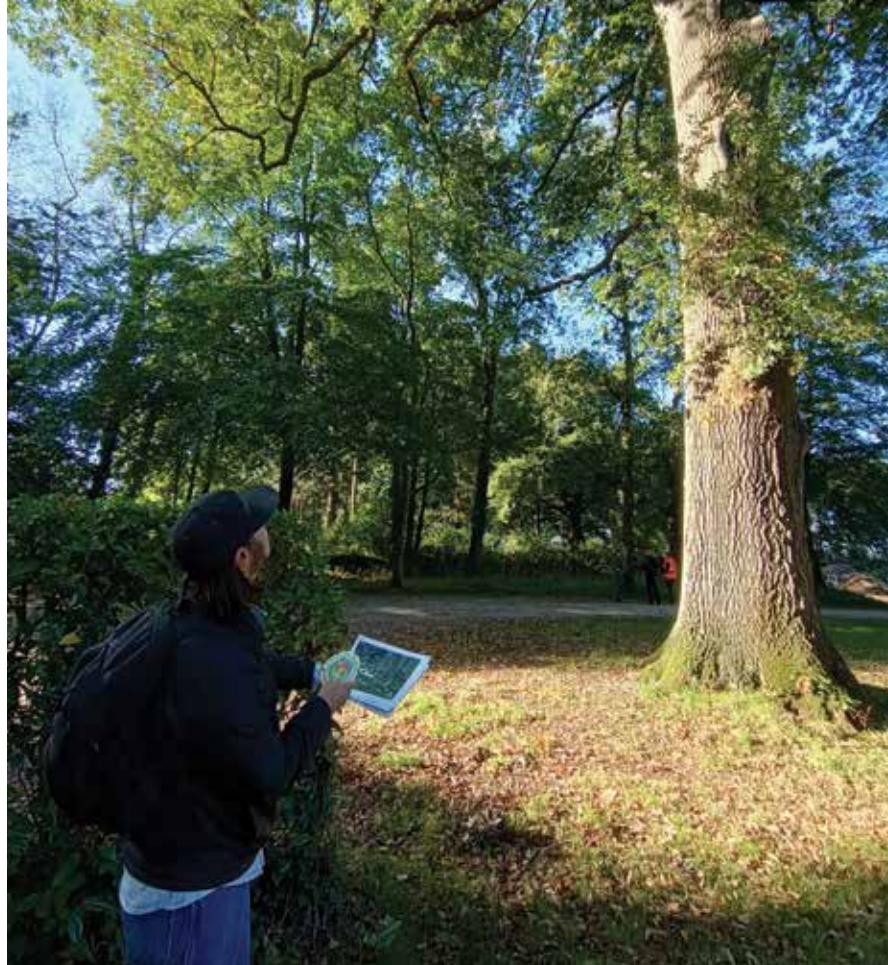
A move from being on the tools to a more Arboricultural management role became my focus. I had already completed an L3 Diploma in ARB while balancing my self-employment commitments, but with finances tight I applied to the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund (FIEPF) and was able to pursue my keen interest in surveying and managing the risk from trees.

The concepts and methodology of Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) particularly interested me as this framework is being widely adopted by Tree Managers and local authorities to establish risk level from groups and individual trees. I attended the two-day QTRA training event taught by Mike Ellison at Kernow Training Centre in Newquay.

What is QTRA?

Tree management is a matter of balancing the benefits of trees with the risk of harm. Although it may seem counterintuitive, the condition of trees should not be the first consideration. Instead, tree managers should first consider the usage of the land on which trees stand, which in turn will inform the process of assessing the trees.

QTRA applies established and accepted risk management principles to tree safety management in accordance with 'Risk Management and Guidelines'



(ISO 31000:2009), which is published by national standards agencies. By quantifying the Risk of Harm as a probability, QTRA enables the tree manager to manage the risk from tree failure to widely accepted risk thresholds.

The training

The programme for day one covered a quick introduction to QTRA, performing a QTRA and a field exercise to understand the risk management process. The six stages of the QTRA process were then covered – context, thresholds of tolerability and acceptability, and the components of QTRA in more detail. A QTRA walkover assessment was followed by assessing target occupation for a one-off event and assessing random distribution of people as a target.

Day two went into some basic tree anatomy and morphology; decay, degradation, loading, adaptation and structural failure; site factors and a field exercise to Trewithen Gardens to conduct assessments on groupings of trees with target ranges which included property, people occupancy and vehicle traffic.

The walkover tree assessment was our starting point to identify the general nature of the tree population and its relationship with significant targets. Large trees adjacent to higher value targets would ordinarily require closer assessment than smaller trees adjacent to a lower value.

Upon successful completion of a test, I was awarded with a certificate and a registered user number.

By completing the QTRA course, I can now:

- Quantify risk in a consistent and proportionate way, using probability-based calculations to assess the likelihood of tree failure and its potential consequences. This allows for more objective decision-making, especially in high-traffic or high-liability areas such as parks, schools, and roadside environments.
- Prioritise tree management interventions based on actual risk rather than subjective judgment, helping landowners and managers allocate resources more efficiently and avoid unnecessary removals.
- Produce professional, defensible reports that meet the expectations of insurers, legal bodies, and local councils - enhancing my credibility and employability in both the public and private sectors.
- Support sustainable tree retention, by demonstrating when risk is within acceptable thresholds. This aligns with broader environmental goals and helps balance safety with biodiversity and amenity value.

In practical terms, I can now offer QTRA-based assessments as part of consultancy services as a woodland officer or surveyor. It will also give me a competitive edge in a market that increasingly values formal risk assessment credentials.

Thanks to the Education Fund, I am now currently one of only three registered users in Northern Ireland.

Woodland Carbon Code recognised with international award

The UK's quality assurance standard for woodland carbon projects has been celebrated as a leading collaborative initiative tackling climate change.

The Woodland Carbon Code has been named as a winner in the 2025 Bloomberg Philanthropies Local Leaders Climate Awards.

The Woodland Carbon Code and Scottish Government secured the Power of Partnership award, recognising the code's work in bringing landowners, companies and communities together to support woodland creation and climate action.

The awards celebrate policies, projects or programmes that have helped to address climate change over the past three years.

"Local leaders know that implementing effective climate solutions brings immediate benefits: cleaner air, stronger economies, and more resilient communities," said Michael R. Bloomberg, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Climate Ambition and Solutions and Founder of Bloomberg L.P. and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

"These winning projects are proof that with commitment and creativity, cities, states and regions can improve lives today while also protecting the environment for tomorrow."

The Woodland Carbon Code is the quality assurance standard for woodland carbon projects in the UK. It sets out requirements for voluntary woodland creation projects which tackle climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.



Allt Ruadh, a Woodland Carbon Code project at Dundreggan, developed by Trees for Life. Photo credit: Ewen Weatherspoon.

Since its launch in 2011, the code has helped to create almost 43,000 hectares of new woodland across the UK. There are now over 845 projects validated to the code which are predicted to remove 14.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Climate Action Secretary Gillian Martin said: "Scotland's world-renowned forests and woodlands are a natural powerhouse, and one of the most important resources we have to tackle the nature and climate emergencies.

"They support over 34,000 jobs, many in rural areas, and every year generate over £1.1 billion to our economy and produce around 6 million tonnes of much needed timber.

"That's why the Scottish Government is committed to expanding our forests and woodlands and has created about 70% of all the new woodlands in the UK in the past five years. This will ensure they continue to provide multiple benefits for Scotland."

The award winners were announced

at the COP30 Local Leaders Forum in Rio de Janeiro on 4 November. Katherine White, Deputy Director for International Development and Climate Change at Scottish Government, collected the award on behalf of the Woodland Carbon Code and Scottish Government.

Pat Snowdon, Head of Economics and Woodland Carbon Code at Scottish Forestry, said: "The Woodland Carbon Code is a powerful example of what can be achieved through collaboration. By bringing landowners, organisations and businesses together, we're creating new woodlands which address climate change, restore nature and support local communities across the UK."

"This award is a fantastic recognition of the work of all those involved in the Woodland Carbon Code, including colleagues across government, project owners and developers, buyers, partners and supporters who have played a part in this journey. Your commitment has made this success possible."

www.woodlandcarboncode.org.uk

UKWAS game release pen requirements to be revised the UK

At its recent meeting on 11 November, the UKWAS steering group considered and approved the recommendation of its revision working group that requirement 4.10.1, which requires that existing game-release pens in areas of high conservation value are taken out of use over time, should be revised.

This requirement had troubled a number of woodland owners and managers, especially those in lowland areas and on traditional estates. The UKWAS revision group was reconvened to address users' concerns and consider amendment of the requirement. External experts participated in the discussions.

A draft revision text will be published

shortly for public consultation.

The revision will be conducted in accordance with the UKWAS standard-setting process version 3.1. A revision timetable will be made available shortly.

UKWAS
UK WOODLAND ASSURANCE STANDARD



Autumn Budget: The good, the bad and the impactful

The hotly-anticipated Autumn Budget took place at the end of November. **Emily Pike**, partner in Brodies' Personal Law team, looks at some of the consequences for forestry businesses.

What were the biggest concerns in advance of the Budget?

If there was any certainty during the months of speculation leading up to the Budget, it was that this was going to be a tax-raising event. After all of the changes to Inheritance Tax (IHT) brought about by the 2024 Budget, one concern was that IHT might be subject to another major overhaul, perhaps introducing a cap on lifetime giving or even bringing in some form of wealth tax.

There was also the possibility of changes to Capital Gains Tax (CGT) rates which could have an impact on forestry and other businesses.

What happened at the Budget when it finally arrived?

This was a tax-raising budget as expected, however, many of the concerns voiced in the run-up did not translate into reality. The biggest single measures were (a) the freezing of the personal allowance and income tax thresholds until 2031, and (b) the capping of salary sacrifice pension tax relief at £2,000 per annum per individual from April 2029.

Was there any bad news for forestry businesses?

Along with other businesses, forestry could be impacted by various business-focussed tax raising measures, including changes to the capital allowances rules and some tweaks to CGT.

In addition, some income from dividends and all income from savings and property will be subject to an additional 2% tax from April 2026 (dividends) and April 2027 (other) although time will tell how the property element will play out for Scottish taxpayers, as at present the changes only apply in England. Forestry income, of course, is usually free of income tax in any event, so this measure should not have a significant impact.

A so-called 'mansion tax', collected through a Council Tax surcharge, was introduced on properties worth over £2m, but this only applies in England for now and is unlikely to impact forestry businesses directly.

And the good news?

Whilst there were a few IHT measures aimed at raising tax, notably the continued freezing of the nil rate band until 2031 (it has been at its current level of £325,000 since 2009, which is nearly £525,000 in today's money) in IHT terms there was more good news than bad for the owners of forestry (and other) businesses.

The IHT changes brought about by Budget 2024, principally the reduction of IHT reliefs on agricultural and business assets leading to an effective tax rate of 20% for assets over £1m, had come in for much criticism in the intervening 13 months. One aspect perceived to be grossly unfair was the inability for that £1m 100% relief allowance to 'transfer' between spouses or civil partners, with the effect that if a business-owning couple left assets to each other on death, the allowance of the first to die would be lost without further planning.

In this year's Budget, the Government announced that the £1m allowance would in fact be capable of transferring between spouses/civil partners in this situation, which is a welcome change. The draft legislation that has already been published will need to be amended, but this is good news in advance of the measures taking effect on 6 April 2026.

The Government has already confirmed that this change will apply to deaths both before and after April 2026.

What planning might owners of forestry businesses now consider, in light of the Budget changes?

The biggest advantage that owners of forestry businesses now have is a greater level of confidence in what the new IHT rules will look like from April 2026, and what the IHT regime in general will be for at least the next 12 months (barring any very last minute changes to legislation).

Planning to take advantage of the £1m allowance between spouses/



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civil partners now no longer seems to be necessary for purely that reason, although there may of course be other good reasons for equalising ownership of business assets and putting in place flexible wills to build in asset protection.

However, other planning, such as passing assets down a generation to make use of multiple £1m allowances – accelerating succession plans in the knowledge that there will be a 20% tax charge for assets over £1m where previously there would have been none – should still be considered.

There is also a narrow window of opportunity to move qualifying assets into trust before April 2026 without a tax charge. Appropriate professional advice should always be sought to make sure planning is implemented correctly.

The cashflow considerations for forestry businesses will still be significant, in light of the new tax burden. Managing these tax liabilities by planning in advance, budgeting where possible, and looking carefully at the timing of felling operations, will continue to be essential for the viability of privately-owned businesses.

At least now these steps can be taken in the context of tax rules that are, relatively, more certain than they were a few weeks ago.



Time for a change in the taxation of forestry?

Iwan Williams and **Adam Corbin**, Partners at Michelmores LLP, employ some blue sky thinking for the taxation policies they would like to see invigorating the sector.

Having held off on writing this article with the expectation that the Autumn Budget would bring changes to the taxation of Forestry, we were disappointed to find that announcements directly relevant to the sector were rather limited.

Clearly, we were in a minority; many will have breathed sighs of relief that there was not a further assault on this aspect of rural business! Upon reflection, the idea that there would be anything forest specific was a little naïve, since the current position has changed little since 1988.

Our view is that there would be much to be gained if a Government ever returned to the times of 100 years ago, when the promotion of commercial forestry was at its zenith, and made a step change in policy to encourage afforestation and the use of timber in construction.

Commercial forestry taxation at a glance

Upon death the value of woodlands is subject to inheritance tax (IHT), but some or all of that value may be relieved by Business Property Relief (BPR), Agricultural Property Relief (APR), and, in certain cases, Woodland Relief.

Woodland can qualify for BPR as a standalone business, if it is actively commercially managed, or as part of a wider composite trading business. It can also qualify for APR if it is occupied with, and that occupation is ancillary to, agricultural land or pasture – for example,

woodland shelter belts.

In the 2024 Autumn Budget, the Government set out proposed changes to the relief from IHT given by APR and BPR. From 6 April 2026, the relief will be restricted as follows:

- Each individual will have a £1 million allowance for assets which currently qualify for relief at 100%. No IHT will be payable if those criteria are met on this £1 million worth of property which qualifies for APR / BPR.
- Above the initial £1 million, the rate of relief will be halved to 50% meaning that an effective rate of IHT of 20% will apply above that level.

In the latest Budget, the Chancellor announced a minor change to the original policy, namely the transferability of the £1m allowance between spouses, creating a combined allowance of up to £2 million on second death. This is a sensible but relatively limited concession in wider context of the changes to APR and BPR, which still stand to have a profound effect on landowners and business owners.

The clock is ticking to 6 April 2026 when these changes really bite, and the window for estate planning before then is closing rapidly.

Woodland Relief defers the tax due on the value of the trees (but not the underlying value of the land) until they are disposed of, but under this relief, the value of the land is not relieved. It only applies on death, and not to lifetime transfers.

Profits from the sale of trees in commercial woodlands are exempt from Capital Gains Tax (CGT) whether the trees are standing or have been felled,



and growing trees are exempt from CGT, where managed as a commercial investment. Where the use of the land upon which the trees are growing is also used for another purpose (e.g. amenity), the value has to be apportioned, and only the commercial timber proportion attracts the relief.

A further relief from IHT and CGT is the Conditional Exemption Tax Incentive Scheme, intended to help preserve and protect national heritage for the benefit of the public.

Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland with permitted or generally available public access qualifies in principle. Transfers of property which qualifies for the temporary exemption, and which has been the subject of undertakings to preserve the property and allow reasonable public access to it.

Since October 2024 and as a natural consequence of the proposed changes to APR and BPR mentioned above, we have seen a marked uptick in woodland owners and landowners exploring Conditional Exemption as part of their estate and succession planning strategy (where circumstances permit).

Income Tax and Corporation Tax do not apply to woodlands managed on a commercial basis and with a view to making profits provided timber cut or felled is not altered or transformed prior to sale.



Iwan Williams (left) and Adam Corbin (right)

This means that the income from a commercial forestry operation is treated as if it is outside of taxation. There is a double edge to this, in that capital allowances cannot be claimed on capital expenditure incurred on plant or machinery connected with commercial woodlands, and relief is not available for losses suffered or expenditure incurred on the preliminary clearance of woodland of woodland or other preparation of land for forestry purposes.

What might changes to taxation policy achieve?

There are many brilliant thought leadership pieces and reports on policy improvement to encourage a sustainable future forestry industry, such as the Future Trees Trust's '12 Policy Ideas To Help Future Forests Grow', Confor's 'The Future is Forestry: Working for the wood - and the trees', and the Forestry Commission's England Trees Action Plan.

We would not want to detract from or regurgitate these works, so in a gross generalisation we proceed here upon the basis that the UK needs a viable commercial timber industry based upon a high-quality timber resource base.

Though we note that the UK Government Timber in Construction Roadmap includes no mention of tax whatsoever, we think there may be ways to encourage this through taxation policy.

What would we do?

- **Revamp Woodland Relief:** Woodland Relief is, in effect, not a relief at all, but a deferment of the tax due on the value of the trees to another day. This does not encourage sustainable or sensible forest management, since the best way to avoid paying tax on the crop is not to fell it! Why not waive the tax if the restocking is of a certain quality, providing for the planting of high-quality timber production species?

- **Bring back unlimited BPR (just for commercial forestry):** It has to be acknowledged that unlimited BPR on agricultural land has driven an enthusiasm for acquisition. It can also be argued that the yearly (if volatile) returns from agriculture have driven demand for tax planning which favours commercial agriculture over forestry. However, bringing back unlimited BPR for commercial forestry would mean a (literally) unrivalled enthusiasm for the asset class and, more importantly, for the establishment of new plantations.

- **Encourage investment in felling and processing:** Why not allow capital allowances to be claimed on capital expenditure incurred on plant or machinery connected with commercial woodlands, and allow loss relief (including sideways loss relief) for the expenditure incurred on the preliminary clearance of woodland or preparation for planting? These seem like easy wins which would

not necessarily decrease the tax take overall, given that these measures would encourage spending and job creation.

- **Support UK timber processing:** In line with the perennial enthusiasm for encouraging the building industry, encouraging innovation in construction timber and value-add products must surely be a win-win. Our view is that it would be helpful to see a modest VAT reduction on value-added timber construction products made from British timber.

Conclusions

Having committed these ideas to paper, we appreciate that even enacting one of them would take months of consultation, use up gallons of political capital, and months of parliamentary time. As such, we recognise that perhaps we had better stick to our day jobs of tackling what is presented to us by the Chancellor, however uninspiring!

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Reforestation Ruaille Buaille



Seán Lenihan, Kestrel Forestry Consultants Ltd, reflects on the ruaille buaille (furore) caused by the unintended impact of policy changes on Ireland's first pro-forestry farmers.

Imagine you're a tillage farmer in Wexford, Lincolnshire or Aberdeenshire, and you have just been informed that for biodiversity reasons you cannot sow 100% of your tillage acres anymore, and that from now on you can only sow cereals on approximately 65% of your land, with the rest perhaps devoted to clover or wildflowers. What would you do?

This scenario may seem outlandish in that the productive capacity of any tillage farm would be cut by 35% via government regulation, however this scenario applies to Irish forestry where many owners are forced to reduce the production potential of their forests by up to 35% at second rotation stage.

A Felling Licence is required for thinning and clearfelling in Ireland. Re-planting after clearfelling is a legal requirement, and the main condition

attached to all felling licences. Replanting must be completed within two years after harvesting. In the 1980s and for most of the 1990s it was permissible to plant 100% conifers - usually Sitka spruce - at afforestation stage.

Many of the crops planted in the 1990s are now mature, and some have already been clearfelled. The problem arises because current afforestation rules are being applied to the reforestation of these sites. Under current regulations 20% of a newly licenced afforestation site must be planted with broadleaves. In addition, 15% of the area has to be set aside for biodiversity which includes unplanted areas or setbacks near watercourses, roads, hedgerows and, in the case of adjacent domestic houses, a 60-metre setback.

When all of this is added up it means that the productive capacity of the forest area can be reduced by up to 35% for the duration of the second rotation. This obviously has major financial implications for owners and their families, who will experience a 35% reduction in thinning and clearfell revenues. For a typical 10-hectare Yield Class 20 Sitka spruce crop, the difference could be as much as €125,000 in lost revenue.

In addition, the owner loses out as no annual premiums are paid for second rotation crops in comparison with the first rotation, when tax free premiums (currently €300/acre for Sitka spruce) are paid for 20 years.

It is not unreasonable to declare that second rotation owners are being penalised quite severely, especially

when they have no choice but to replant. The majority of these growers who decided to make a major change in land use and switch part (or in some cases all) their farm from mainstream agriculture to forestry were pioneers.

At that time in the 1990s there was a marked reluctance on the part of farmers to get involved in forestry. Many owners who did were regarded as failed farmers by their peers and were the subject of derision in some cases. The main farming organisations were anti-afforestation for many years until they realised that some of their members (12,000 approx.) didn't agree and decided that forestry was a better financial option than sheep or dry stock on certain soils.

In response the farm organisations then decided to set up forestry sections within their structures

The afforestation rules and specifications changed after 2000 when it became compulsory to include broadleaves and biodiversity areas in all new plantations – this ranged from 20-25% initially and has since increased to 35%, so these newer growers were aware that the productive capacity of their plantation was going to be less than previous plantations in the 1990s.

The other major loser here is obviously the timber processors who will have to plan for a market with 35% less raw material available from these plantations. At a time when afforestation in general, and coniferous afforestation in particular, has dipped to disastrous levels (753 ha. in 2023) it certainly creates a very challenging future for the processing industry to say the least.

There is no doubt that these early adopters eventually influenced others who had been sceptics to plant and avail of the tax-free premiums and future tax-free timber revenues. The industry as a whole owes them a debt of gratitude and not a severe financial penalty when one considers that between the years 1990 and 2000 a total of 117,841 hectares were afforested by private growers.

This cohort should have been, and should be, allowed to replant practically 100% of their forest areas with conifers allowing a certain percentage for watercourse setbacks. This would have been the fairest and most just outcome for these pioneering landowners who kickstarted the private afforestation revolution in Ireland in the 1990s.
www.kestrelforestry.ie



Forestry England sets out tree species list for the nation's forests

A list of priority tree species to futureproof the nation's forests against climate change and disease has been identified by scientific analysis.

The nation's forests, managed by Forestry England, will be made more resilient by planting 30 carefully selected tree species chosen for their ability to survive future climate challenges and disease threats. Forestry England's new tree species for the future list provides a science-based framework to guide tree production and planting decisions across the nation's forests for decades to come.

The list includes familiar and emerging species, each assessed against 10 key criteria including climate suitability, pest resistance and timber potential. This approach addresses the urgent challenge of building forest resilience as the nation's forests face increasingly extreme weather, climate pressures, and pests and diseases.

Forestry England's list follows the Future Productive Species list published in September by Scottish Forestry. This set out the 28-strong list of tree species recommended for forestry in Scotland. Forestry England's tree species work is separate though complementary to the Scottish exercise, and the list has been developed specifically for the 1,500 forests and woodlands in their care.

The final list of 30 species was drawn from a longlist of 63 species and is

tailored to Forestry England's six forest districts using local data for regional relevance and national consistency.

Dr Eleanor Tew, Forestry England Head of Forest Planning, said: "Forest resilience is our most critical challenge. Climate change is already here and affecting the nation's forests. In the past 18 months we've experienced the wettest winter, hottest spring and hottest summer on record and we're seeing a marked increase in tree pests and disease. Against this backdrop, we need to increase domestic timber production and ensure our forests deliver even more value for society and nature.

"Planting the right tree species is critical, and our tree species for the future list gives our foresters evidence-led guidance to do this. It gives us the confidence to focus our ongoing investment in our plant and seed supply capabilities, so we can produce more of these species ready to plant. By reducing reliance on a few species, and planning strategically for likely future conditions, the nation's forests will continue delivering value for society, nature and the domestic timber industry."

This initiative is part of Forestry England's broader forest resilience strategy and action plan, which sets out a comprehensive approach to managing the nation's forests to adapt and thrive, including clear actions on diversifying tree species and forest structures.

Though not prescriptive, Forestry England's tree species for the future list can be adapted by anyone involved in woodland management across England.

Forestry England tree species for the future

- **Aspen** (*Populus tremula*)
- **Beech** (*Fagus sylvatica*)
- **Coast redwood** (*Sequoia sempervirens*)
- **Common alder** (*Alnus glutinosa*)
- **Corsican pine** (*Pinus nigra subsp. *laricio**)
- **Douglas fir** (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
- **Downy birch** (*Betula pubescens*)
- **European silver fir** (*Abies alba*)
- **Field maple** (*Acer campestre*)
- **Grand fir** (*Abies grandis*)
- **Grey alder** (*Alnus incana*)
- **Hornbeam** (*Carpinus betulus*)
- **Japanese red cedar** (*Cryptomeria japonica*)
- **Lodgepole pine** (*Pinus contorta var. *latifolia**)
- **Macedonian pine** (*Pinus peuce*)
- **Maritime pine** (*Pinus pinaster*)
- **Norway spruce** (*Picea abies*)
- **Pedunculate oak** (*Quercus robur*)
- **Red oak** (*Quercus rubra*)
- **Rowan** (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
- **Scots pine** (*Pinus sylvestris*)
- **Sessile oak** (*Quercus petraea*)
- **Silver birch** (*Betula pendula*)
- **Sitka spruce** (*Picea sitchensis*)
- **Sweet chestnut** (*Castanea sativa*)
- **Sycamore** (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)
- **Western hemlock** (*Tsuga heterophylla*)
- **Western red cedar** (*Thuja plicata*)
- **Wild cherry** (*Prunus avium*)
- **Wild service tree** (*Sorbus torminalis*)



The FISA FWM Framework Evolution

An update on the framework developed to futureproof Forestry Works Manager training against increasing environmental responsibilities and regulatory risk.

Key initiatives from the FISA Forestry Works Manager Working Group (FWM WG) signal an uplift in the provision of information for works management training and accountability, taking access to training for professional development and environmental stewardship to a new level.

A digital hub for FWM training

FISA's updated FWM Competency Framework, released in October 2025, represents a fundamental elevation of how the industry supports continuous professional FWM development. Core is a newly created series of pages on the FISA website that function as a centralised signposting facility to training for Forestry Works Managers.

What makes this approach particularly valuable is the review of training scopes/outlines by the FISA FWM Working Group. Training providers must meet submission and review before their courses are included. This review process ensures that FWMs can browse both core and specialist training courses with confidence, knowing that what they're viewing meets industry requirements.

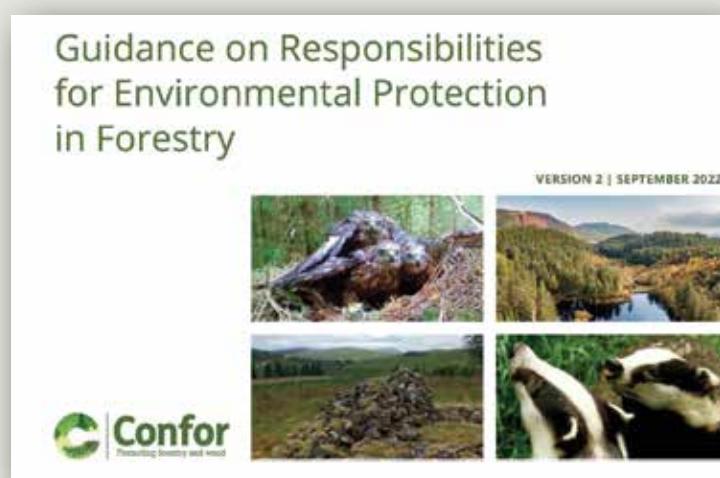
The framework operates on a straightforward principle: connect FWMs with training that genuinely meets their needs. Managers can view approved training scopes and link directly with associated providers enabling FWMs to identify credible training in a fragmented market.

The October release also includes a detailed CPD documented layout that FWMs can adopt wholesale or adapt to their specific circumstances. This flexibility acknowledges that forestry operations vary considerably in scale and complexity, and professional development tracking needs to reflect this.

Environmental responsibility comes into focus

A significant element of the initiative is the launch of training addressing environmental protection arrangements - a direct response to the growing recognition that FWMs carry substantial environmental responsibilities alongside their health, safety, and operational obligations.

Developed collaboratively between the FWM Working Group and the Forestry



Industry Environmental Group (FIEG), this new training scope centres on Confor's 'Guidance on Responsibilities for Environmental Protection Arrangements in Forestry' (GREPF).

In the same way that FWMs gained awareness training on their health and safety roles through the FISA-published Guidance on Managing Health and Safety in Forestry (GMHSF), they now have an equivalent pathway for environmental management.

The training reflects an integrated approach to management where health, safety and environmental considerations are intertwined rather than treated as separate compliance exercises. It's a more sophisticated understanding of the FWM role and acknowledges the interconnection between operational risks and environmental impacts.

Training course overview

The environmental awareness training scope is comprehensive without being overwhelming and covers environmental roles and responsibilities across forestry operations, examining how these intersect with the FWM Competency Framework. Candidates will gain an understanding of:

- Legislative background
- Principal Regulatory bodies, roles and responsibilities, consultation and communication
- Industry Standards
- Environmental Roles and Responsibilities in Forestry
- FWM Competency Framework
- FIEG (GREPF)
- Commissioning competent personnel

- Key environmental protection issues and areas – in reference to UKFS
- Licencing and permissions
- Principles of prevention
- Standards, monitoring and supervision arrangements
- Incident response and reporting

Industry adoption and scaling

The Training Scope has been taken up by a number of training providers who have developed course content and resourced competent trainers to enable the delivery of this training to the Forest Industry at scale.

Equipped for the future

These developments position the forestry sector well for an operating environment where environmental expectations can only be predicted to intensify. By equipping FWMs with both the knowledge and the tools to discharge their environmental responsibilities effectively, the industry is building resilience against regulatory risk and reputational damage.

The framework is now in place and will be regularly reviewed in order for FISA to provide the 'go to' information when it comes to the provision of resilient and professional FWM training.



For more information on the FWM Training Page and Environmental Awareness Training Scope, visit www.ukfisa.com/Training/Forest-Works-Manager.



The Platinum standard in pickups

Eamonn Wall samples the smooth V6 diesel engine in the top of the range Ford Ranger Platinum.

The Ford Ranger is the best-selling pickup truck in Europe and the current model, introduced three years ago, has really continued this momentum in sales. It might not be the most common pickup at your local cattle auction (where the Toyota HiLux still seems to rule the roost) but the Ranger is most certainly a common sight in the rural UK.

Most of the Rangers, and its sister the VW Amarok, come equipped with

the Ford two-litre diesel engine. More recently a plug-in hybrid vehicle (PHEV) version with the 2.3 litre ecoboost petrol engine has become available, complete with a lower BIK company car tax that will attract some buyers.

The model tested here is the smooth Ford V6 diesel fitted as standard to the top of the range Platinum model.

All Rangers and Amoraks are built in the same factories in South Africa and Thailand. The factory in South Africa has a capacity of 200,000 vehicles a year.

Most come equipped with the same 10-speed automatic gearbox but slightly different four-wheel drive systems. A six-speed manual is also available standard on the base model which costs £32,000 plus VAT.

The model tested here has the full-time four-wheel drive system. It is a new e-4WD system with electronically controlled torque on demand transfer case, and electronic rear differential. It has 240bhp and a useful 600Nm of torque, ideal for towing.

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Two years ago, I tested the Ranger two-litre diesel version and the Amorak V6d and was not too impressed with the latter's 24 mpg. The two-litre was more like 30mpg. This time around I averaged 28.7 mpg over 1,500 miles covered in two weeks. So that makes it a lot more user-friendly.

This Platinum model comes with all the bells and whistles and costs £49,000 plus VAT. The most costly Isuzu costs £40,000 plus VAT by comparison. Extra options fitted to my test vehicle were carbonised grey metallic paint at £600, a power roller shutter with load box liner comes in at a whopping £1,800, and a Technology Package93 at £700, giving a grand total of £52,380 plus VAT (£62,856). So, it better be worth the money.

The short answer is that it is a really good vehicle. The V6d gives it the power it needs so that you are not looking for more power, unlike with the two-litre which is a bit slow accelerating. The V6d does the business and thus is an easy vehicle to do loads of miles in. It was one of the few vehicles I was sorry to hand back as it was certainly a match for my Discovery 4 in many ways.

It does not feel super fast, but does never feel slow which is more important for the high mileage. The Discovery is even faster and feels more powerful but the Ranger handles and steers superbly.

The interior is very well-designed, and the phone voice works really well too. The door mirrors are huge and useful. The brakes are okay but not a particularly strong point, though



perfectly adequate. The seats are very comfortable and the B&O stereo very good. The engine being a V6 has a lovely muffled sound, perhaps even quieter than that fitted to the Discovery.

The new Discovery 5 of course sports Land Rover's new straight six-cylinder motor.

The official 0-60 mph time is 8.7 seconds, and I know you don't buy a pickup for speed but when driving a lot, a bit more power makes for a more enjoyable drive. Top speed is an irrelevant 111mph. It is a heavy vehicle at 2,486 kg and can tow a 3,500kg braked trailer. Fuel tank holds 80 litres and 19.3 litres AdBlue. Ground clearance is good.

The Wildtrak model used to be top of the range and accounted for 60% of sales. Now Platinum is top dog unless you count in the Raptor model with its three-litre petrol engine and another new model the MS-RT. As you can see from the photos, this Platinum model adds in some extra chrome-like grille details





which detract from the otherwise very good design and detailing. The interior comes with fancy leather seats and that B&O stereo. The headlights are very good.

One thing I noted as a bit unusual is when you stop in traffic, the brakes come on. There is no creep. This can make manoeuvring out of tight spots a bit hairy as you need to give the accelerator a good prod to make the vehicle move but you don't always want this sudden thrust of propulsion.

The steering is very good and makes the vehicle a delight to thread along twisty roads. The seating position is very comfortable and the visibility good, but the large mirrors can hide cyclists and the like.

It is a large vehicle being 5,370mm long, 2,208mm wide and 1,884mm high. For comparison the Isuzu D-max is 5,280mm long, 1,870mm wide and 1,790mm high. A Range Rover is just over 5m long.

So, could a Ranger replace a Discovery 4 then? Interesting question, but the issue for me is that a pickup is not as useful as you cannot, for example, fit a step ladder in a pickup. When I visited Vietnam a few years ago, both Toyota and Ford sold very useful tough SUVs which would combine the Ranger with a more conventional rear SUV end.

The rear split door of the Discovery is very handy and the interior has a huge boot and extends to van like proportions when all the seats are folded flat. You can not do this with a pickup. But then a pickup is made for a different job; keeping chainsaws, pesticides and tools away from passengers, and/or for carrying stuff - be it sheep or the like.

If you need a work horse and need a pickup per se, then the V6d Ranger is superb. It's got the ground clearance, smooth power, refinement, clever design - I do like those interior door handles hidden with the door pulls - nice steering, good handling, towing and off roading ability.

It is large when in town but of course it is not meant for town. It is for working on site or for working in the woods. It has to be the best looking pickup out there and it is not surprising it sells so well.

Eamonn Wall Bsc Msc FICFor is an arboricultural and forestry consultant and managing Director with Eamonn Wall & Co Woodland Design and Management.



Climate to community, farms to forestry

A project using trees to stop a notorious flooding problem was among the champions honoured at this year's Scotland's Finest Woods Awards.

When you add in a project to plant free nut and fruit trees in urban gardens where greenspaces are limited and the transformation of a Highland croft that has been in the same family for centuries, the excellence and breadth of projects from the newest Scotland's Finest Woods Awards winners makes it one of the best years ever.

This year, 10 trophies were awarded in seven categories: Quality Timber, Farm Woodland, New Native Woods, Community Woodlands, Climate Change Champion, Schools and Early Years, and the new Urban Forestry Award.

Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon presented the Awards at an event in Scottish Parliament. She said: "What a fantastic celebration these awards are - they showcase the very best of Scotland's woodlands. The enthusiasm and passion of all those involved in managing their woodlands shines through each year.

"The awards cover a vast range of woodland types from quality timber, native, community, farm and urban woodlands, to woodlands for schools and early years children. The breadth of the awards itself demonstrates how forestry today is woven into so many aspects of Scottish life.

"Congratulations to all the winners and especially to the schools and young people - you are our foresters of the future, and your work is very inspiring."

Finlay Carson MSP, convener of the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, and the Awards

ceremony's sponsor MSP, said: "It is a great honour to be hosting Scotland's Finest Woods annual awards ceremony this year and I know from previous events that it promises to be a wonderful celebratory occasion to recognise marvellous achievements across this wide and growing sector.

"It will be nice to honour the winners on the night but also celebrate and pay tribute to the many others who have contributed so much to ensure Scotland's Finest Woods finally get the recognition they so richly deserve."

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and Transport Scotland won the Woodland Trust Scotland Trophy for New Native Woods for the Rest and Be Thankful Woodland Creation site in Argyll. These slopes are notoriously unstable, and a number of engineering works have been carried out to help stabilise them and protect the road infrastructure.

Native woodland creation complements the "hard" engineering and brings other benefits such as improved water quality and added landscape and conservation value.

Farming and forestry form an important part of the Awards, and a great example was seen at Norman Laing's croft at Edderton, near Tain. His work with forestry agent Dietrich Pannwitz of Sylvestrus Ltd won the F&W Forestry Farm Woodland Award & the Lilburn Trophy for All Farm / Croft.

Key achievements include planting native pinewoods, productive conifers, and shelterbelts, enhancing biodiversity, reducing grazing costs, improving

livestock shelter, and contributing to carbon sequestration.

Rhanich Croft was also Highly Commended in the New Commercial Woods category, part of the Quality Timber Awards.

The winner of the Glennon Brothers New Commercial Woods Trophy was Rosebery Estates for Moorfoot, Midlothian. This saw Rosebery Estate Partnership, Galbraith, and Michael Wilson of Scottish Woodlands Ltd work towards the establishment of a productive woodland as an alternative to agricultural activity on hill land.

The winner of the John Kennedy Trophy for Multi-purpose Woodlands for Whole Forest or Estate was Dave Newman, c/o F&W Forestry, for Quinlochmuir Forest, where former summer grazing pasture for sheep and cattle has been transformed to provide a commercially viable plantation which can produce a sustainable volume of timber to the market with good road access.

Wilma Harper, the new Chair of Scotland's Finest Woods, said: "This is the 40th anniversary year of Scotland's Finest Woods and what a year it has been for celebrating all that is great about our woods and forests!

"Like the forests, the Awards have grown to encompass all elements of our finest woods. We celebrate our forests growing quality timber and protecting the environment, woods supporting farms and community enterprises, inspiring the next generation in schools and, for the first time this year, bringing trees to the heart of the cities."



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Award winners among first cohort of Professional Forester Degree Apprenticeship graduates

Several new graduates from University of Cumbria's National School of Forestry have received prizes from the Royal Forestry Society.

The University of Cumbria is proud to celebrate the graduation of the first cohort from its Professional Forester Degree Apprenticeship, delivered through the National School of Forestry (NSF) in Ambleside, the largest provider of undergraduate forestry and woodland courses in England.

The Professional Foresters Apprenticeship was developed as a partnership between the University of Cumbria National School of Forestry, the Forestry Commission and the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF).

The course equips apprentices with the skills and knowledge most valued by the professional body. Graduates leave with a degree accredited by ICF and Skills England, ready to lead in forest and woodland management or progress to postgraduate study.

Gareth Hopkins MBE, Forestry Commission Apprenticeship Programme Manager, said: "Forestry is a hugely rewarding sector to work in and plays a key role in helping with the climate

crisis, and it's immensely exciting to see so much achievement from the first cohort of Professional Forester Degree Apprenticeship graduates.

"The Forestry Commission has been integral to the partnership with the University of Cumbria in the development and the delivery of the Professional Forester Apprenticeship since 2021. The mix of academic study and work experience on the apprenticeship provides a tremendous opportunity for the apprentices to grow into the role of a Professional Forester, ready to hit the ground running within the sector once they graduate."

The University of Cumbria has most recently celebrated the outstanding accomplishments of three graduating students from the BSc (Hons) Professional Forester Degree Apprenticeship, each recognised this year by the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) for excellence, dedication and contribution to the future of the forestry profession.

Two students, Lara Jo Bazzu and Gareth Biggins, have been awarded the prestigious RFS Student of the Year prize for the Professional Forester Degree Apprenticeship.

Lara has been awarded this for recognition of her consistently exceptional academic performance throughout the programme. As a student

entirely new to forestry at the start of the degree, Lara's transformation has been remarkable. Her meticulous approach, outstanding attention to detail, and determination to gain the fullest possible understanding from every module have resulted in the highest final degree mark on the programme.

Gareth has received this prize in acknowledgement of his reflective, considered and collaborative approach to study. Changing career to join the degree, Gareth brought with him a wealth of cross-disciplinary experience that enriched both his own learning and that of his cohort. He has consistently produced work of exceptional quality, demonstrating dedication, insight, and professionalism throughout the programme. Gareth has also achieved Chartered Forester (MICFor) status.

The North West Division of the RFS Prize has been awarded to Rikky Sweet, whose hard work, determination and exceptional personal progress have deeply impressed the academic team. Rikky has drawn on his strengths, such as strong attention to detail, to elevate his learning and performance. The significant improvement in his work over the course of the degree, as well as the challenges he has overcome, stand as an inspiring example to his peers.

As the forestry sector faces new ecological, environmental and economic challenges, the University of Cumbria is delighted to see its graduates stepping into the profession with such capability, insight, and commitment.

Helens Manns, Dean of the Institute of Science & Environment, University of Cumbria, commented: "This first cohort of Professional Forester Degree Apprenticeship graduates represents a landmark moment for the University of Cumbria. We set out to create a programme that blends academic excellence with real-world practice, and the achievements of Lara, Gareth, and Rikky show just how transformative that vision has been."

"Their dedication and professionalism embody the future of forestry in the UK. As they enter a sector facing complex challenges, we are proud to see them equipped with the knowledge and skills to lead. As pioneers of this unique programme, their success sets a strong precedent for future foresters."



Tilhill Harvesting expands fleet with strategic investment and acquisition

Tilhill Harvesting, part of Tilhill Forestry and member of BSW Group, has completed a multi-million-pound investment to expand and modernise its harvesting operations, now operating the largest and most advanced harvesting fleet in the UK, alongside enhanced steep-ground expertise following the acquisition of Duffy Skylining Ltd.

The business now runs 35 harvesters and 33 forwarders, including the latest John Deere 1270G and H models, a wide range of Tigercat tracked harvesters, and forwarders from Ponsse, Komatsu, and John Deere. Machines are selected to suit terrain and timber type, with most units tracked for rugged, rougher sites.

As part of Tilhill's commitment to performance, reliability and sustainability, all machines operate on a rolling five-year renewal programme, ensuring the fleet remains up to date with the latest technology, lowest emissions, and best-in-class operator comfort and safety.

"We've built a fleet capable of delivering safely and efficiently across any terrain - from exposed Highland slopes to productive lowland clearfells," said Graeme Kemp, Harvesting Director. "We match equipment to site, so we can scale output without compromising on safety or sustainability."

The latest John Deere 1270H harvesters show signs of improved productivity in the field, with better operator ergonomics, enhanced oil flow, and extended 1,000-hour service intervals. Meanwhile, the Ponsse Scorpion Giant can deliver up to 400m³ per day in mature stands, and



Tigercat 855C units are deployed on steep ground, capable of handling exceptionally large trees over one metre in diameter.

Tilhill has also bolstered its steep ground capacity through the acquisition of Duffy Skylining Ltd, a specialist business based in Inverness. The move adds four skyline systems, 12 machines, and a skilled team led by Calum Duffy, now heading up Tilhill Steep Ground.

"This isn't just about equipment," Graeme stated. "Calum and his team bring specialist expertise in skylining, chainsaw felling and steep-ground safety. There are very few operators in the UK who can do what they do. Their

knowledge not only brings a rare level of capability to our team but also opens harvesting opportunities that wouldn't otherwise be possible."

As part of Tilhill Forestry's fully integrated service, the company is expanding its innovation pipeline by trialling mechanised tree planting systems - combining nursery, forest management, and harvesting expertise to improve planting consistency, speed, and workforce sustainability.

With these investments, Tilhill Forestry reinforces its role as a full-service forestry provider and a major player in securing timber supply for the UK's low-carbon economy.

Green-tech launches Arbortec boots competition to celebrate tree planting season

Tree planting season has begun, and Green-tech is fully stocked and ready to support landscapers, contractors, foresters, and local authorities with

everything they need to get trees in the ground this winter.

To mark the start of this year's season, Green-tech has launched a competition offering the chance for four people to win a pair of premium Arbortec boots worth over £200. One winner will be drawn each month from November 2025 until February 2026.

Entering is simple. Teams on the ground this season are invited to share a photo of their planting efforts – this can be on-site unloading for the job, mid-

planting, a finished project or even in the office co-ordinating the teams in the field. Entries can be submitted via social media by tagging official Green-tech accounts or by emailing your photos to marketing@green-tech.co.uk.

All submissions are automatically entered into the monthly draw.

For more information on the Arbortec Boots competition and to see the full range of tree planting products, visit www.green-tech.co.uk.

Biotech firm raises £4.5m for North American expansion

Scotland-based Rhizocore Technologies has attracted significant investment to expand soil health applications at home and overseas.

Rhizocore Technologies, a biotechnology company which uses fungi to improve tree growth and survival rates, has secured £4.5 million in investment to scale its innovative approach to forestry and woodland restoration.

The funding round was led by The First Thirty, a specialist investor in technologies to improve soil health. The round also includes participation from Scottish Enterprise, as well as from existing customer The Grosvenor Estate, one of the UK's largest landowners.

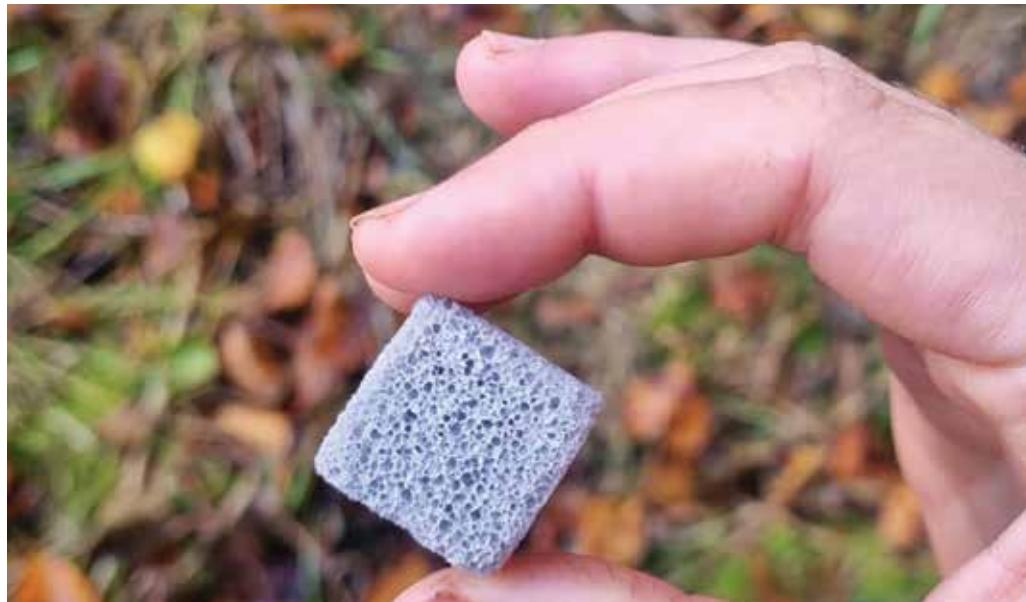
The interest in investment comes in response to overwhelming market validation for Rhizocore's technology and will allow the company to increase supply to meet future demand.

Rhizocore's product works by providing saplings with specific Ectomycorrhizal (ECM) fungi. These fungi form a symbiotic network with the roots, helping trees absorb more nutrients and water. This is especially important in the vulnerable early stages of a tree's life, underpinning survival, resilience and growth to deliver financial returns on forest assets.

Plantings using RhizoPellets™ across numerous sites and involving major industry partners have delivered unprecedented results. Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) found that treated trees have shown a 97% survival rate compared to just 78% for untreated saplings, a relative 25% improvement in survival rate.

Head of Forest Management Support at FLS Gareth Waters commented that the organisation now plans to expand the use of the pellets across multiple sites during the next planting season, with ongoing monitoring to assess their long-term impact.

Rhizocore, which spun out from the University of Edinburgh and Deep Science Venture's Food & Agriculture Science Transformer (FAST) programme in 2021, now operates across more than 100 active field sites. It delivers proven growth enhancements and survival across a diverse range of environments,



from clear-felled forests and former agricultural pastures to heather moorlands.

The company's advanced technology also enables successful tree establishment on challenging terrains, including reclaimed mining land and high-altitude landscapes.

Dr Toby Parkes, Founder of Rhizocore, said: "We are excited to be working with both existing and new investors, including several of our customers, who are experts in forestry and soil health. The consortium of investors participating in this round is backing our data-driven, nature-first approach to enhance the success of tree planting and the forestry sector.

"Our results clearly show that planting success can be increased by tapping into the belowground fertilisation superpowers of fungi.

"The fact that two of our existing customers have invested in this round is a testament to the work the Rhizocore team has put in, developing the knowledge and technology to unlock the potential of fungi to improve their returns. This capital will accelerate our business scaling plans, unlock new markets, and advance our mission of

protecting, harnessing, and restoring fungal biodiversity."

In addition to supporting expansion into North America, where 1.4 billion trees are planted annually, the new capital will be used to fund a significant increase in production capacity at Rhizocore's Scottish facility in Roslin to fulfil its growing multi-year order book across the UK and Europe.

Derek Shaw, Director of Entrepreneurship and Investment at Scottish Enterprise said: "Rhizocore's breakthrough in fungal biotechnology highlights the kind of nature-based innovation that can scale rapidly and deliver impact.

"This investment not only strengthens Scotland's position in the global bioeconomy but also demonstrates how data-led approaches to soil health can unlock new commercial opportunities while restoring our natural capital and a boost to the environment too."

Antony Yousefian, General Partner at The First Thirty, added: "We invest in technologies that unlock the economic value of soil health, and Rhizocore is the perfect example. Their technology demonstrates that enhancing soil biology is not only an ecological benefit,



but also a powerful driver of financial returns. By making land assets more resilient and productive, Rhizocore is creating the economic incentive that will pull billions in new capital towards large-scale restoration."

The Grosvenor Estate is a real estate development and investment company which invests in food and agricultural tech companies and has a portfolio of urban and rural properties across the world. Its land holdings include the

39,000-hectare Reay Forest Estate in Sutherland.

"Having recently completed comprehensive natural capital baselining across our rural estates, we are now developing long-term plans to leverage nature-based solutions that improve biodiversity, soil health and flood resilience," said Davy Portway, Head of Venture Investment at Grosvenor.

"Our partnership with Rhizocore is

well timed to support these ambitions, and we are particularly excited to assess the impact on belowground biomass amongst the trees we have planted along with RhizoPellets™.

"Rhizocore's locally adapted mycorrhizal fungi solution aligns seamlessly with our sustainability goals, which aim to deliver the dual benefit of accelerating nature restoration while enhancing tree growth and planting survival rates."

True North Real Asset Partners builds forestry expertise with two strategic appointments

True North Real Asset Partners, the UK's largest afforestation investor and specialist climate action-focused fund manager, has expanded its forestry investment management team with two key appointments.

Chris Hamill has been appointed as a main board director, alongside Samuel Roberts. Both join True North from leading roles in the UK forestry sector, bringing extensive experience in woodland creation, forest management and sustainable land use across multiple large-scale projects.

CIO James Jackson said: "We are delighted to bring Chris and Sam on board at an exciting

time for the business. Creating our own in-house team sets the company apart, providing unrivalled expertise and seamless afforestation management from concept to operational handover.

"This marks a big and exciting step for True North as we begin new planting schemes this season in both Scotland and England, together with a strong pipeline of new schemes under development."

The new additions will manage True North's large existing afforestation pipeline across Scotland and northern England and focus on new project generation as the fund channels further investment into the sector.



Harry Humble, Chris Hamill and Sam Roberts

EU Institutions reach deal on targeted revision of EUDR

The European Parliament and Council have agreed a provisional political deal on a revision of EUDR to simplify implementation and postpone application for most operators.

A provisional political agreement on a targeted revision of the EU regulation on deforestation-free products (EUDR) has been reached. The aim is to simplify the implementation of the existing rules and postpone their application to allow operators, traders and authorities to prepare adequately.

Background of EUDR

The regulation on deforestation-free products entered into force in June 2023 with the aim of ensuring that certain commodities, such as cocoa, coffee, soya and timber, and their derived products placed on or exported from the EU market have not caused deforestation or forest degradation.

Its main provisions were initially due to apply from 30 December 2024. Following concerns raised by member states, third countries, traders and operators about readiness, an initial one-year postponement was adopted in December 2024. As a result, the current EUDR becomes applicable as of 30 December 2025.

The UK was designated as a low-risk country in May 2025. Countries under this classification will only be subject to 1% annual compliance checks; a significant reduction compared to up to 9% for high-risk countries. This will reduce the expected administrative burden for UK exporters and signals strong alignment between UK forest governance and EU sustainability standards.

The latest amendment to EUDR, proposed by the Commission in October 2025, responds to continuing implementation challenges, in particular the need to ensure the effective functioning of the new EU information system and alleviate red tape for smaller operators.



What has been agreed?

The European Commission, Council, and Parliament entered trilogue negotiations on 4 December 2025 to agree on a final compromise text. Although talks were expected to run until a vote in the week of 15 December 2025, the co-legislators supported the Commission's targeted simplification of the due diligence process.

The three institutions also removed the 'grace period' initially proposed by the Commission for large and medium companies, opting instead for a clear extension of the application date for all operators until 30 December 2026, with an extra six-month cushion for micro and small operators.

Under the new agreement, the obligation and responsibility to submit the required due diligence statement will fall exclusively on the operators who first place the product on the market. The co-legislators have agreed that only the first downstream operator in the supply chain will be responsible for collecting and retaining the reference number of the initial due diligence statement, rather than passing it on further down the chain.

The simplified declaration for micro and small primary operators was also clarified. These operators will only submit a one-time simplified declaration and will receive a declaration identifier, which will be sufficient for traceability purposes.

Furthermore, both the Council and

Parliament underlined the importance of ensuring continued exchange with experts, stakeholders and all relevant operators on the implementation of the EUDR. This should take place within the existing framework of the Commission expert group multi-stakeholder platform on protecting and restoring the world's forests.

Both institutions also agreed to require competent authorities to report significant IT system disruptions to the Commission to ensure the smooth functioning of the system, but with flexibility to minimise administrative burdens.

The European Commission has been tasked by the co-legislators with conducting a simplification review and presenting a report by 30 April 2026. The report should evaluate the impact and administrative burden of the EUDR, particularly for smaller operators, and indicate ways to address the identified issues, including through guidelines and improvements to the information system.

The report should, where appropriate, be accompanied by a legislative proposal.

Next steps

The provisional agreement will now have to be endorsed and formally adopted by both the European Council and Parliament and published in the Official Journal of the EU by 20 December 2025 before entering into force, replacing the current EUDR.

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Primary 7 pupils from Doonfoot Primary School, Ayr, were provided with a tour of the Land Energy factory just outside Girvan in November.

The visit was organised as part of their curriculum to learn more about electricity, biomass, and environmental issues, and to give pupils real-life insight into careers in science, technology, and engineering. It also offered them an exciting opportunity to see how biomass is produced and sold.

One pupil said: "I loved learning that Land Energy uses parts of trees that would usually be wasted, which reduces greenhouse gases."

Over the two visits, nearly 60 pupils were given guided tours of the site that included an overview of the company's carbon reduction ambitions, key manufacturing processes, and jobs within the company.

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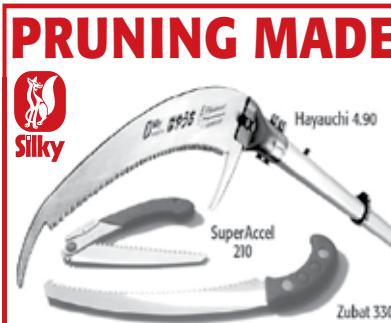
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