HOUSE OF LORDS

Land Use in England Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Land use in England

Monday 28 March 2022

3.30 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Curry of Kirkharle (In the Chair); Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville; Lord Borwick; Lord Curry of Kirkharle; Lord Goddard of Stockport; Lord Grantchester; Lord Harlech; Lord Layard; The Earl of Leicester; Baroness Mallalieu; Baroness Redfern; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 6 Heard in Public Questions 55 - 73

Witnesses

I: Sir William Worsley, Chair, Forestry Commission; Stephanie Rhodes, Delivery Director for the England Tree Planting Programme, Forestry Commission; Dr Darren Moorcroft, Chief Executive, Woodland Trust; Caroline Ayre, England National Manager, Confor.

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Examination of witnesses

Sir William Worsley, Stephanie Rhodes, Dr Darren Moorcroft and Caroline Ayre.

Q55 **The Chair**: Welcome and thank you very much indeed for coming. I made a comment earlier that some of you have spent a lot of time appearing before parliamentary committees, but we are very delighted that you are appearing before this one, so thank you.

This is an evidence session of the Land Use in England Committee. You have in front of you a list of interests that have been declared by members of the committee. This meeting is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website. A transcript will be taken and published on the committee website, and you will have an opportunity to make corrections to that transcript if necessary.

I want to start by exploring with you the Government's ambition. We are seeing lots of statements about policy, the impact on land use of tree planting and the need for increased biodiversity. There is concern about whether there is enough resource to deliver the Government's ambition and whether it is realisable. Of course, you folks have a key role in all of that.

Sir William Worsley: Certainly the ambition is significant. We are looking at trebling the planting of trees in this country. We are looking at planting over 7,500 hectares a year in England. To put that into perspective, in 1971, when you had tax relief for planting trees, we got 6,500 hectares planted, so I do not want to underestimate the challenge of doing this.

Having said that, we are in a very different place now. Climate change is upon us and something that we need to take very seriously, and the most cost-effective way of mitigating carbon is by planting trees. It is not about money; the England woodland creation offer is a very generous grant scheme—as generous a grant scheme as we have had, certainly during my career. If we can get the future environmental and management scheme right, we have to find the right land. That is the challenge. We have to persuade people.

Forestry, or timber, has been quite profitable for the last two or three years, but before that we had a 30-year period where, quite frankly, forestry—timber production, woodlands—was pretty unprofitable. We have to persuade people of the economic reason, as well as other reasons, for planting trees.

Caroline Ayre: The Institute of Chartered Foresters produced a report in October 2021 called *Can't See the Skills for the Trees—Critical Shortages in Forestry Workforce Skills Put Climate Targets at Risk*.

The Chair: Yes, I saw that.

Caroline Ayre: The report is referred to in the EFRA report. It sets out quite clearly where we are with the gap. Looking at England alone, the

gap is not just in woodland creation. We need to look at establishment, management and the use of wood.

The Chair: Are you saying that this is not just about money but about having the skilled workforce?

Caroline Ayre: Yes, it is about having the skills and the numbers of people. We have an ageing and declining workforce with the skills to deliver what we should be delivering, which is quality tree planting and woodland management.

The Chair: Is it achievable?

Caroline Ayre: It is if we all pull together. We need to not complain but to come up with a solution to do it, and there are collective bodies that are doing that.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: We know that we need to build nursery capacity, because even if we wanted to put the trees out there and we had the people, we would need the trees. One of our challenges is the sustainable sourcing of seeds. We are at risk of importing significant numbers of trees, which often bring challenges with them. We have seen 127 pests and diseases that might knock out the mature species that we already have. It is a real challenge for us.

Picking up on what other contributors have said, it might not be the money that is the problem but the land. In urban conurbations, trees can do an awful lot of good for an awful lot of people, and we need to look at who owns the land and who has influence over the land, so that we can bring our levels of urban tree cover up to a standard that I think will benefit society as a whole.

The Chair: Are you seeing that in new developments? Is adequate tree cover being included in new urban developments?

Dr Darren Moorcroft: We are not seeing it at the moment. There is an opportunity in urban developments. From a Woodland Trust perspective, we believe that every new development should have at least 30% canopy cover within it. We think that is sustainable for the development itself but also for the people who will be moving into those homes as we face a climate and nature crisis. The shade from the trees will provide a cooling element for the development and will be able to capture rainwater and potentially alleviate the risk of flooding. There is a whole range of benefits if we get the systems in place to deliver them.

Q56 **The Chair:** One of the deep concerns is about mapping and the appropriate use of land. Has there been any mapping of appropriate land use by any of you here?

Sir William Worsley: Can I touch on the urban first and then come on to mapping, if I may? There are some very good examples in the National Forest of incorporating tree cover into development schemes. I looked at a really good example a couple of years ago in a district just outside

Liverpool—I cannot remember its name—where they were doing a massive development. Green cover had been built in right from the beginning of the development, and that is the key message that I would give. Trees have a real place in all developments—that is very important—but they need to be thought of right at the beginning, not as an afterthought.

The Forestry Commission has done a lot of mapping, Natural England has done mapping. There is a lot of mapping out there. There was a lot of mapping in the National Forest. Local authorities have mapping, and AONBs and national parks have all got lots of mapping done, but I do not think it is co-ordinated enough. It is very difficult to integrate it, and a lot more work needs to be done on mapping. Tony Juniper, the chair of Natural England, and I have had a number of conversations about the importance of mapping.

Stephanie Rhodes: On mapping, there are three things that need to be resolved to help us move forward. The first is the availability of the data to map. Some data is easily available at a national level and some is not. That is the first obstacle to be overcome. The second obstacle is having an agreement at least to share understanding across different land uses as to how we use that data to drive decisions on land use priorities. For instance, the Forestry Commission is quite keen to see a presumption in favour of woodland creation in certain areas, but how do we reach an understanding of where that would be? The third element is how data is maintained, kept up to date and reviewed.

There are some good examples. For instance, the Forestry Commission has mapped areas of relatively low regulatory constraint, which is a first step in the direction that we want to move in, but we need something that is much more strategic and comprehensive.

Q57 **Baroness Redfern:** Following on from what Sir William said about trebling planting, and Darren Moorcroft mentioned the domestic nursery sector, do we know what the domestic nursery sector's ability is to increase productivity? Does anybody know whether we have sufficient enforcement to safeguard against buying plants from abroad?

Caroline Ayre: Confor represents the nursery sector as well. We represent the largest producers of forest trees in the UK. On behalf of my members, I can say that, yes, the trees will be there. We just need to have confidence in the timescales of the grant offers and the planting offers to be able to produce them. You need a three-year timescale to be able to sow the seed and grow a tree to the height that you need, so you need that confidence. Stephanie can talk about plant health and plant imports.

Stephanie Rhodes: Picking up first on what Caroline said about increasing the confidence of the nursery sector, that is one of the key things we are working on through the Nature for Climate Fund to give the sector visibility on what is coming down the pipeline to help them to invest. The second element is encouraging innovation and modernisation

of the sector, which I have to say is inconsistently up to speed with the latest technology. The third element is helping the sector to invest, with capital funding being made available.

On plant health, Caroline is absolutely right. Limiting imports is one of the best ways to limit the risk of disease spreading. More importantly, together with stakeholders in the nursery sector and Defra on plant health, a plant health standard has been put in place that helps the nursery sector to define, implement and monitor the right measures to mitigate that risk.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: To put some scale on that, the EFRA committee report on tree planting released last week estimated that we will need at least 30 million tree seedlings a year. That tells you the scale of the requirement, which links back to the Chair's resource question.

The Chair: Yes, indeed.

Q58 **Baroness Mallalieu:** Can I ask you about terminology? What do you mean by woodland, forestry and commercial forestry? What are the distinctions between the three, and to what extent is the confusion that some of us have about the terminology being shared in the policy-making?

Sir William Worsley: First, forestry is a very highly regulated activity in England. High environmental standards apply through the UK forestry standard, and they apply to design, management, planting and so on. That point covers the whole. Woodland and forestry are the same thing, but forestry tends to refer to larger-scale, perhaps more productive, activity than woodland. However, there is no real differentiator between the two.

I prefer talking about productive forestry rather than commercial forestry. If you are a farmer, you plant your crop. If you make a mistake, by the next year everybody has forgotten. If you are a forester, you plant your crop, and if you make a mistake, people will remember it for 50 years. There is a sort of tarring of commercial forestry when people think about the square blocks of Sitka spruce that were planted in the 1950s and 1960s. That does not happen now, and cannot happen now, because of the UK forestry standard. So my point about commercial forestry is that you need to talk about productive forestry. My point about woodland and forestry is that I do not think there is any difference between the two.

What is key is that all woodland should be multipurpose, even if you are looking at planting a productive forest. We have to remember the importance of economics to land managers. If we are going to persuade people that they should turn farmland or whatever into woodland, there needs to be an economic reason as well as just pure grants. As I said, the England woodland creation offer is a very generous grant scheme. It effectively pays you to plant your land, and then there is the £300 per hectare payment for 10 years. That is absolutely super for a 10-year window, but there is then the time on from that.

Therefore, you need to understand the importance of economics and all the other things that come with that. I am thinking about well-managed woodlands. The importance of the management of woodlands is absolutely key. Well-managed woodlands can provide so many benefits—not just timber but carbon, access, landscape, ecology, health and well-being, environment and many other things. If your woods are well managed, they can be productive and produce everything else.

Caroline Ayre: I could not have put that better. The definition of forestry is the science of planting, establishing, maintaining and repairing trees in a plantation or a natural growing growth area, including conservation. So forestry is a catch-all term for silviculture or arboriculture, which is the science of managing trees. It is a chartered profession, so I agree that confusing the terminology does not help anybody. It creates or perpetuates misperceptions and misconceptions about what is productive forestry, because it can deliver for everything and everybody; it is one of the only land uses that can.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: Building on that—this links back to the first question—if you asked laymen, members of the public, the difference between woodland and forestry, I think they would say that forestry is for timber production, and for woodland they would think about the holistic benefits from trees. As has been said, it is not as clear-cut as that, but the challenge is that, for any given piece of land, one size does not fit all.

Therefore, we have to make sure that we are dialling up the potential of a piece of land to deliver for the societal benefits that trees can give. In some places it will be timber production that is dialled up, in some places it will be nature, and in other places it will be access. I suggest that you would not want to dial most of those things down to zero in pursuit of one of them. Sir William's adage that your mistakes live long in the landscape is right when you are talking about previous forestry practices.

The Chair: The public perception of the definition might be different. Is there any confusion in policy, with government grant schemes, between woodland and forestry?

Dr Darren Moorcroft: No.

Caroline Ayre: No.

Q59 **The Earl of Leicester:** How much traction is continuous cover forestry gaining? I am assuming that it is increasing percentage-wise, but I know that the Forestry Commission had a penchant back in the day for clear-fell.

Sir William Worsley: I will have a crack at this and then pass on to people who can probably answer it better than I can. It depends where in the country you are. Continuous cover forestry is easier in the south-west than it is in the north. I have tried, in my own woods, unsuccessfully. It depends on what you are growing. If you are looking at hard woods, it is much easier than for conifers, for example.

I think there is some traction. There is a lot of discussion about it. Foresters love discussion. As a woodland manager myself, I have certainly found continuous cover more difficult; unless you are talking about old oak woods and the like, when you want to have a continuous age and you take groups of trees out and replant. One of the problems with continuous cover is wind blow. If you get a hole in a wood, the wind gets in, whisks it up, and blows further trees down. It requires careful management. You can do it in hard woods, but it is more difficult in conifers, as I said. Caroline may disagree.

Caroline Ayre: Continuous cover is a very skilled silvicultural system. There are a few foresters in the UK who get it right, but it is not an easy outcome to achieve.

Sir William Worsley: The percentage is probably 10% to 20%.

Caroline Ayre: If you want a percentage, we can get back to you on that.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: We operate it on a few, but only a few, of our 1,200 sites. We would use it rather than clear-fell as part of a restoration programme.

Caroline Ayre: It has its place, absolutely.

The Earl of Leicester: I was going to say. Presumably the Woodland Trust, by virtue of its name, does not carry out clear-fell, or have you found reason to do so?

Dr Darren Moorcroft: The only places where we have found reason to do so are obviously where there is disease and plant health notices. We have had significant clear-fell requirements because of phytophthora and the like, and we have also seen wind blow, which Sir William mentioned. We have seen significant numbers of trees lost in certain areas, which is the equivalent to a clear-fell when you are trying to manage a woodland over a longer term.

Q60 **Lord Harlech:** What is needed in the environmental land management schemes to encourage better take-up and improved management of woodland schemes and to go a little bit further? In Wales, mature forests that are sequestering carbon and making good habitats do not, or will not, attract funding under the new funding schemes. In a way, people are being incentivised to fell those productive woodlands, which are offering all those biodiversity gains, and to plant saplings. It seems counterproductive in a way. That is something that we want to avoid in England.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: Yes, it is absolutely counterproductive. Carbon sequestering from mature woodlands is around 200 million tonnes. Chopping down those trees, which are often the most biodiverse nature-rich crown jewels of England and the whole of the UK, in pursuit of planting saplings is counterproductive.

For the ELM schemes, we need to ensure certain things. Similar to what we said about the nursery sector, we need to build certainty for landowners. From our experience of working with a significant number of landowners each year, some are sitting on their hands waiting to see how the schemes play out, because it is a commitment that many of them may not feel comfortable jumping into straightaway. Certainty is required in the scheme design. Longer contracts are required. In comparison, an agri-environment scheme that pays a landowner for creating a pollen and nectar mix, which has a 12-month annual delivery over five years, kind of works, but that timeframe does not work for woodland creation. We need to think about how the contracts are played out.

The opportunity with ELMs is to simplify the offer. We offer various schemes to landowners outside of government schemes. We are conscious that government has about seven woodland creation schemes, so there is a potential complexity of opportunity, which means that people may not know which one to go for and so go for none of them.

Sir William Worsley: I think uptake of these schemes will come down to effort and reward.

I back up what Darren Moorcroft just said about the need for certainty. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that a lot of landowners are hanging back from making decisions as to whether to plant land—I know this as fact, not just fiction—because they want to know what the requirements of ELMs will be. It is not because they think there will be more money. It is not about money. Everybody accepts, all the firms of land agents accept, that the England woodland creation offer is a good grant scheme. The money is there. What people are concerned about—and I understand this from my own perspective—is what other requirements ELM may bring in on land that you have already planted, which will make it difficult for you to meet them. Once you have planted your land, it is there; you cannot change it. It is forestry or woodland in perpetuity.

The second point is about the opportunity, if we can get the ELM scheme right, to get our unmanaged woods in England into management. Only about 20% of our broadleaf woods in England are managed. It is an extraordinarily low proportion. We have had lots of discussions with our colleagues in Defra about the environmental land management schemes, and if we can get it right so that we are looking at the whole holding—remember that forestry and woodland in England is only 10% cover—they are a very sensible way of approaching this. Then we can put money into the schemes to encourage, to push, people to manage their woods, and suddenly we will see huge benefits, particularly environmental benefits, from these woods being managed.

Stephanie Rhodes: Could I add a couple of considerations to the element of stability and ease of process? The first goes back to the first example, which is to make sure that the incentives are geared towards the public goods which the woodlands are expected to deliver, and to

create a balance that is more favourable than alternative land uses. The incentives need to be sufficient.

The other really important aspect that we are increasingly hearing about is that landowners are fully awake to the fact that biodiversity or ecosystem services markets that are currently immature will develop in the years to come, and are asking us now what assurance they can receive that their schemes can be open to private funding later, in the future, even though the mechanisms are not known yet. Building that flexibility into ELM schemes, or at least keeping the door open to future possible substitutions, is something that we are hearing increasingly loudly as an important driver for uptake.

The Chair: Interesting. William, do you think that tenant farmers will be able to play a part in all this?

Sir William Worsley: There are two different types of tenant farmer, as you will be aware. There is the farm-business tenant, and there is the tenant under the Agriculture Holdings Act 1986. I speak also as a farmer. If you have land under a farm business tenancy, the likelihood of being able to enter into the scheme is pretty slim, and I am not sure that you would necessarily wish to. If you are an Agriculture Holdings Act tenant, where you have security of tenure, there are opportunities, and people will be able to participate. Obviously they would need to do so in conjunction with their landlords.

I know the bits of land on my farm that are profitable. I am an arable farmer, so I am talking about cropland. I know the bits that are not as profitable for the farm. People can know all this by yield mapping and the like. It is very easy to know. There can be corners or bits of land that I think one could get money through the England woodland creation offer for planting up. I think there are opportunities there for AHA tenants, yes, but it is about collaborating sensibly with their landlords and having good communications.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: We have had experience over the last eight years of running schemes for farms, particularly agroforestry schemes. What is telling is that less than 10% of the 250,000 trees that have gone into the 200-odd agroforestry schemes that we have put in has been for tenants. We have good examples and poor examples, from a tenant's perspective, of their ability to access and put trees in. The good examples are probably wedded to institutional landlords. There is a challenge for us in how we can open up the tenant-farm landscape, because for the tenant farmer and the landlord, and for wider society, it is an opportunity for that land to be more productive with trees on it and to deliver a greater food security measure, because the productivity from the farm perspective is better.

Caroline Ayre: The delivery of the environmental land management scheme is getting away from farmers. Let us talk about farmers, foresters and growers, for one thing. Change the nomenclature for those who manage the land. Rather than seeing the land management scheme and

previous schemes as the only income from trees, it is about advice and education about how those trees can deliver so much more for you. They can deliver timber and a diversified income for your farm and for future generations. I do not think that the psyche within the farming community is there.

The Chair: You think that it will require more innovation by those who occupy the land and own the land than we have seen in the past.

Q61 **Baroness Redfern:** Part of my question about the ELMs has been answered, but I will go back to Defra. Defra has said that, "Following lessons from previous schemes, the ELMs will be more flexible and responsive to farmers' needs", but gives little detail about how either the necessary productivity increases or the environmental benefit will be brought about. Are you saying that that is the main barrier, that you need more detail?

Sir William Worsley: Yes, I think we need clarity on the ELM. We need to know exactly what ELM will mean. If you are a farmer, you want to know. You already know which bits of land that you have on which you could do what I call environmental work in the broadest sense—the bits of land on your farm that are not particularly productive—but you need to decide what. You may plant trees or you may use it for grassland or whatever. Until we know, until we have clarity as to exactly what ELM will require and provide, people will be cautious. Why make a decision today? You could make it next year. Land managers look at things on a long timescale, so they do not want to rush something that could be a terrible mistake today.

Baroness Redfern: You are saying that it would need much more detail.

Sir William Worsley: Yes.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: We also need to recognise the cultural barrier. We have been through an agricultural system and a land use system that has been very land sharing/land sparing, with a focus on land sparing. It has been a case of, "This block of land will grow this crop of wheat, and that block of land will be for conservation, and that block of land will be for trees".

We have seen that agroforestry schemes, which ELMs can be an opportunity for, can enable us to start to look at broadacre farms with trees integrated in the fields and to maintain productivity in the soils. On livestock farms, sheep and cattle have been seen to benefit from the dry weight from having agroforestry systems in place. We are seeing more and more storms, poor weather and the like, and shelter belts and thinking about agroforestry in the round can help to break some of the cultural barriers. Breaking those barriers helps ELMs and helps on a bigger canvas, because people will start to think about how they use their land in a more integrated way rather than in a piece-by-piece land-sparing model.

Stephanie Rhodes: I do not know if it helps to put it broadly into two categories, but the constant questions we hear from stakeholders are almost of a dual nature.

The first is about forestry land use and having confidence in the continuity of the forestry offer under ELMs, which would take forward the innovation through the England woodland creation offer, for instance, of paying public money for a public good.

The other is the opportunity cost, which has been flagged by colleagues on the panel. What other land uses might be more appealing in a future offer? We have the transition element and the wider, new offer element.

Q62 **Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville:** First, apologies for my late arrival. What is needed so that forestry can best play its part in agendas other than timber production—for instance, working towards net zero, carbon capture and/or biomass, and embedding conservation and access?

Caroline Ayre: I am intrigued by your phrase "other than timber production". We have a reasonably small area of productive woodland—26% conifer in England—which produces the majority of what we use. Our industry is based on softwood. So the phrase "other than timber production" intrigues me a little bit.

It absolutely comes back to the multipurpose, multiobjectivity, of woodland, and what it can deliver. We are talking here about a land use strategy, and we need to have diversity and resilience within the landscape, so we should be looking at a mosaic of different types of woodland within the landscape, from short rotation forestry that can deliver very fast-yielding productive timber through to protecting parkland trees, individual trees and veteran trees.

So, again, this question smacks of the dichotomy of production versus conservation. It is a bit of a worrying question, actually.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville: So you do not think that timber production promotes biodiversity.

Caroline Ayre: Absolutely it does.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville: You can walk through a conifer forest and it is absolutely silent.

Caroline Ayre: It depends where you are walking. I can show you some beautiful conifer woodlands that are vibrant with biodiversity.

Sir William Worsley: I think there is a strong link between the productive management of woodlands and conservation. A conifer wood should not be solid conifer; you have other things with it. Forestry is a highly regulated activity in this country. You cannot just do anything you want. You have to meet the UK forestry standard. That is the second point to be made. In England, most forestry is and should be

multipurpose. My own woods in Yorkshire are productive, but we have a mix of conifer and broadleaf to try to achieve that.

It is also important at the current time to bear in mind the importance of timber as well as everything else. We import over 80% of the timber we use in this country and, of that, 10% comes from Russia. It is highly likely—we are doing a lot of work on this at the moment—that considerably more than 10% comes from Russia, because it comes through other countries. So we will have a shortage of timber in this country, depending on how long the Ukraine war goes on. I do not think we should be anti productive forestry. We should be managing productive forestry properly, which I believe we can do.

The largest planted forest in Europe is Kielder Forest in Northumberland. I love going up to Kielder, because what Forestry England is doing there is so impressive. Lord Curry, you will know this well. There are lots of areas that should not have been planted and lots of areas that were not planted very well. I am not making excuses, but we are trying to make things better up there by changing the planting schemes, particularly when the crop comes to maturity, and replanting. Wilding has been part of the scheme. There is a great scheme in Cumbria, Wild Ennerdale, which is an exemplar of wilding. There are lots of things that we can do. We have to manage our woodlands well and then we can get all the things that we require from them: timber, environment, ecology, access, all the public benefits.

What has been particularly interesting over the last two years with Covid and the Covid lockdown is the number of people who have come out into the countryside and benefited from it. There has also been a change in the type of people who have come over the past two years, the number of young families, who we never saw before. I like walking and I walk a lot. I have seen a number of families with children, and we never saw that before lockdown. I am sorry for that rather long and rambling answer.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: Picking up on the point of the question, we need to be honest and recognise that there are productive woodlands that are not doing as much as they could for biodiversity, and that there are probably some biodiversity woodlands that could do more for productivity. That is where we need to move to. In our *The State of UK's Woods and Trees 2021* report, we found that only 7% of the UK's woodlands were ecologically sound. They are not in a good place, and that is primarily about management but also about thinking about how we create them.

At the root of your question is what we need to do. There are four things to do to align the forestry side of things with all its targets. It needs a clear strategy. We have lots of different strategies, lots of different plans, and we have some helpful targets. It is useful to see the tree canopy target come in, because it allows us to take value from the street tree and the rural woodland.

We have talked about public funding. ELM schemes have a crucial part to play in pump-priming and changing the culture of how people view trees.

Then there are the markets. Woodland carbon is the most mature market, but it is still a fluctuating market. We need to make sure that it does not turn into what has been called the wild west out there, driving the wrong decisions and putting the wrong things in the wrong places in pursuit of the current market while not thinking about future opportunities.

The final thing is regulation, on which I might have a slightly different view from other panellists. We see the UK forestry standard as something that needs to be improved. We think it is okay, but if you are going to leave so much discretionary choice, you cannot say that it will become an exemplar for all types of forestry. It has the opportunity to do that. If we get that right from a land-use strategy perspective, it could shape decisions about lots of woodland—woodland that starts out from the biodiverse end of the lens and woodland that starts out from the productive end of the lens.

Q63 **The Earl of Leicester:** I am very encouraged by all those answers. I wholeheartedly agree with the point that having productive, and therefore profitable, woodland allows you to do all these other wonderful things for biodiversity, public access and interpretation, and allows the woodland itself to sequester carbon more quickly.

Going back to Sir William's points and the woeful fact that we import 80% of our timber, is it not one of the problems now, or one of the problems that the forestry industry will face, that so many small sawmills have gone bust and we do not have the capacity in this country to process our own timber?

Caroline Ayre: We have to remember that we have a £2.2 billion wood industry in the UK that is absolutely predicated on softwood, on conifer. It has been built up over 100 years, since the start of the Forestry Commission in 1919, and conifer is what was planted after the war. Those are the facts. We have mills that process predominantly softwood. Sixty-seven per cent of our mills process softwood, 27% process a mixture, and a few now process solely hard-wood. A significant percentage of that is imported, because we do not have the quality in the country.

The Chair: Does the price of timber not lead to more innovation and investment?

Caroline Ayre: It does, but for mills to invest—and there are mills that want to continue to invest—they need to have the confidence that the continuity of supply will be there.

The Chair: Of course.

Q64 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** I go back to the question of the targets that have been announced that run alongside the nature Green Paper.

They have been built up to be like the net zero of nature, if you see what I mean—not that there will be zero nature, but the equivalent of the carbon net zero target.

This question is for Sir William. What does the Forestry Commission see as its role in delivering that target, not so much through its own estate but through the grant-giving process?

The second question is for all the panel to answer and is about woodland that is underperforming at the moment. Sir William knows that I have a different view from his about what is known as PAWS—plantations on ancient woodland sites—which in the past have been planted up with conifers and could do more of a multifunctional job for carbon, wildlife, access, human health as well as productive timber if they were restored more to their ancient woodland nature.

Sir William Worsley: One thing that the Forestry Commission needs to be doing, my role in particular, is giving leadership to the sector. It is important to get out there, encourage people, talk to people, engage with people, and we are definitely doing that. We have that ability through our woodland officers, and we have increased their number significantly over the past couple of years. For those who do not know, the Forestry Commission is split into three parts—Forestry England, which is the largest land manager in England; Forest Research, which is our research organisation and is England, Scotland and Wales; and Forest Services, which delivers government policy and regulation. It has effectively doubled in size over the last couple of years, so we have many more woodland officers on the ground to get out there, advise and give support to people.

Of course, the key thing that we have is a very good grant scheme. On PAWS—plantations on ancient woodland sites—ancient woodland in England is woods that were woods in 1600. Baroness Young and I have slightly different views on what I might call an obsession—and I mean that politely—to restore all PAWS. I think it is the right thing in the right place, so the restoration of PAWS, which we have done an awful lot of in the Forestry Commission, is important, but you must look at the specific site rather than just having a blanket approach.

A lot of my woods are plantations on ancient woodland sites, so I need to be clear about that, but the Woodland Trust has come to look and it says that what I am doing is all right.

Caroline Ayre: I am not going to question PAWS policy, but I think that gradual restoration is very important, and Fingle is an excellent example of that. But we are losing productive capacity through the restoration or removal of conifers pre-rotation from PAWS sites, and through lack of restocking. We need compensatory planting elsewhere, because—back-of-a-fag-packet calculation—we are losing probably half of our productive capacity through these different policies. Timber demand will triple by 2050 worldwide, and unless we have the capacity to produce our own timber we will have to keep importing, and then we are passing on higher

sustainability standards in this country to areas that do not have those standards.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: I should declare an interest here. I do not know if we have been to William's sites. On the PAWS question, I suppose the key thing from the Woodland Trust perspective but also from a sector point of view is to recognise that the real value of an ancient woodland is predominantly under the ground. I was asked whether we clear-fell. One reason why we avoid that is not to bleach the soil for the things that will germinate up from that.

I take Caroline's point that we need to maintain the productive capacity of England for its timber, but I argue that it links back to the mapping point. We know where these sites and the soils are that are important for biodiversity, their capacity to deliver against climate challenges and so on. Therefore, we have the opportunity through the public forest estate, whether it is a 250,000 hectares or in private landowners, to provide them with a means to deliver something for society that is one of the most important biodiverse habitats in the UK. They are literally the equivalent of our rainforests, because a lot of them are rainforests in different parts of the UK.

There is a real opportunity to look at PAWS as a way through a land use strategy model that says that we know what it is capable of delivering. We know what society needs from a climate and nature perspective, and we should be actively encouraging the restoration of those sites so that we do not simply move forward with future generations where we have 2% of the land mass as ancient woodland and declining. It has the opportunity to be brought back.

Stephanie Rhodes: If I may add a point to William's introduction specifically on the grant-giving question and the role of the Forestry Commission, we see it as broadly twofold. First, the Forestry Commission has a role to play in being a translator between the government policy priorities and what will make sense from a landowner's decision point of view. Our first role is to help reconcile those into a grant scheme that makes sense for government priorities and for landowners. The second part is the implementation of those and providing the technical advice and support to landowners to make sure that they can deliver UK forestry standard-compliant woodlands that carry on delivering benefits for the long term.

Q65 **Lord Borwick:** Sir William, I think one of the first things that you said when you sat down was how important it was for everybody to realise that growing trees is a profit-making occupation. I want to learn more about the metrics of this. Is it a profit-making occupation relative to running an arable farm, which I think you also mentioned? Can you persuade an arable farmer that they ought to give up being an arable farmer and start being a forest grower, or is it a mixture of risks and time systems? If it is profitable, why is Ms Ayre saying that the amount of forestry is going down?

Sir William Worsley: The answer is, yes, I both farm and forest. I must admit that I farm on the better land and probably forest on the less good land. On full-time wheat land you cannot compete by growing trees; that is absolutely straightforward. We should be using the good land in the country for food production. I am not arguing that we should be planting that land up, but there is lesser-quality land, quite a lot of the land half way up the hill—the white grassland, unprofitable sheep land, that sort of land—where you can probably make more money growing trees than farming. There are also the poor bits of land on your farm, the corners, perhaps shelter belts and the like, where you can improve your farm profitability by growing trees. There is a mix. You must look at the whole holding. I am not saying that you can argue for trees against wheat, because frankly you cannot, but not every bit of land can grow wheat.

I notice on quite a lot of my own woodland that it is reasonably high quality, perhaps barley land rather than wheat land, but it grows very good trees extremely well and reasonably quickly. Of course, from the economic perspective, until the recent uplift in timber prices, forestry has been a pretty unprofitable business to be in, which is why there is not a lot of well managed forestry. There are some absolute examples, but there is a lot of poor woodland in this country because it has been so unprofitable and people have just closed the forest gate. We need to get people in to manage their woods. We are importing a huge amount of firewood from abroad. Why? We should not be. We have so much woodland that could be thinned to produce firewood, for example, and we should be using our own, rather than importing.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: You asked how we would persuade an arable farmer to plant trees. I suppose my honest answer is that I would not do it myself. I would take him to the arable farmer who is planting trees and to the east of England, the breadbasket—I come at this from the perspective of having managed an arable farm myself and having put in alley cropping—which means that he is not only producing a greater productive capacity for that field, or food—so it will be through fruits and nuts as well as the cereal crops—but maintaining the sustainability of that system. The trees are stopping the wind blow of the soil that would be leaving his farm and ending up on the road next door or in the gardens of the people in the village.

There are real opportunities for us to think about integrating trees into farms, as long as the conversation with the farmer is not a wholesale shift from one to the other. Culturally that is not what they see themselves doing. It is not what I saw myself doing when I was an arable farmer, but I did see myself thinking about the long-term sustainability of the land and who would be managing it after me. That is the argument that I would put in front of the farmer.

Caroline Ayre: I absolutely agree with both William and Darren. The difficulty is that the land that is the cheapest to plant is the middle hill, bracken land, which then comes up against the complexity of different regulatory issues and priority habitat. That means that you go through a

long and protracted application process. It takes a lot of money and a lot of effort, to get to a point where you do not even know whether you will put a tree into the ground.

The other issue, and it must be mentioned, is grey squirrel and deer management. The last however many years of planting has been predicated towards broadleaves. If you do not manage the mammals that will destroy them, you will have no quality timber. There are estates in the south-west, Clinton Devon being one, that will not plant broadleaves because it is just impossible to get quality. That must be addressed.

The Chair: As a trustee of Clinton Devon, I can confirm that.

Lord Borwick: Can you persuade the institutions in the City of London that people can get a better return on their financial investment, and over what sort of period? It would have to be an institution looking at a 20-to-40-year return.

Sir William Worsley: There are a number of financial institutions that are investing a lot of money in forestry.

Lord Borwick: Are they increasing their investment?

Sir William Worsley: Yes, and they are desperate to find land to plant. This is productive forestry. They are buying mostly in Scotland, not in England. Scotland has had good leadership for getting trees planted. They have done an extraordinary job. Gresham House, which is one example, is passionate about planting trees. They see it as a very good opportunity; the price of forest land up in the Borders and other places is significant.

There is real opportunity in 20-plus years. For the next 20 years we are pretty okay for timber supply. That is against the fact that we import 80% already, but, post that, there are concerns about the supply of timber from this country going down. So investment houses see this as having potential of significant financial benefit.

Lord Borwick: But they would have to look at it more as an opportunity in 20 years to get the most—

Sir William Worsley: You look at forestry in the way you look at a portfolio of investments. Forestry is a long-term, not a short-term, investment, but it fits in with a mix of different things. When I was acting as a chartered surveyor, quite a long time ago, I was involved in forestry investment. The market was nothing like as good and it was quite difficult. Now the figures are such that it is quite encouraging for people wanting to invest. They would like to invest in England, but they find it too difficult to find the land in this country.

Lord Borwick: That is a very optimistic opinion about the future of the industry. I cannot quite get the hang of that attitude, given all the other stuff that you have been talking about, such as the shortage of people and the shortage of resources.

Sir William Worsley: I am pretty optimistic about the forest industry, put bluntly, but then I am a born optimist. It is still some way away, but we must encourage people in. The Forestry Commission has people coming in from quite interesting and different careers. They are having a midlife change of career and want to get involved in this sector, because they see it as a good sector to be involved in. My previous chief of staff came from the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office and the Civil Service are pretty well at the top, and getting someone from that field to work in the Forestry Commission was quite encouraging. Our previous head of policy was an equivalent. I am quite optimistic about the future, but we must find the land to meet the planting targets so that we can persuade people to plant and give them the good message that it is not a silly thing to do.

Q66 **Chair:** I have a couple of questions while we are on the subject of economics and metrics. First, Lord Cameron sent a note through saying, "Why, from an investment point of view, would you plant trees when the underlying value of bare woodland is probably about £1,000 per acre and you can sell good arable land for £8,000 an acre? By planting trees you are potentially devaluing a capital asset". Is that a fact, and is that a concern?

Sir William Worsley: The answer is that you would not plant £8,000-an-acre arable land. In my part of the world, if you could buy it for £8,000 an acre, you would be doing pretty well. It is way more than that, so that is not the land you would buy to plant. It is the more marginal land, the land that is referred to as the white land half way up the hill, that is currently producing sheep supported by the single farm payment. If that goes, what will that land produce? If it is growing trees, it will produce something potentially quite valuable, but it is quite a long-term gain. If you plant your trees, you will not get any money for at least 20 years.

Caroline Ayre: Depending on what you plant, of course.

The Chair: We spoke earlier about other benefits, and we have not talked about how to revalue those other benefits. The whole concept of natural capital is now gaining traction, and to have a multifunctional woodland would surely be reflected in the natural capital value of that woodland. Baroness Bakewell talked earlier about walking through Sitka spruce and not hearing a bird singing. Surely if natural capital worked properly there would be an incentive to go for multifunctional woodland that would address some of those issues.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: Absolutely. We need the market to mature sufficiently to recognise those values. We are seeing it in the insurance market, for example; people are identifying that flood alleviation coming from sustainable forestry models has the potential to bring in blended finance on top of public funds for public goods, as well as the carbon market, which has been mentioned already.

Those markets need to be properly regulated. I am probably as big an optimist as William, but the big issue is the real risk of inflated land prices

as a result of people buying up land to plant, which we are seeing in Wales and Scotland, and using it with the view that in 40 years' time it may give them a return, having monetised the carbon and perhaps put that carbon back into the atmosphere for future generations.

We need to recognise the natural capital benefits of multifunctional woodland and that, in that way, you give a true price to that woodland. That is not to say that we should not be supporting woodland that is only doing two or three of those things. I just do not think that we should be supporting ones that are doing one of those things.

Stephanie Rhodes: To illustrate the first steps that we are taking in this direction, less than a year ago under the Nature for Climate Fund we launched the English woodland creation offer, which not only quantifies but recompenses with hard money, public money, the delivery of these public good for new woodlands. I completely recognise that it does not do much yet for existing woodlands, but if you create a woodland in an area that has been mapped with very important flood mitigation aspects at stake, and the design of your woodland helps to mitigate that risk, you will get extra payment—and similarly for biodiversity and for water quality. In an ideal world, the ecosystems services market would be mature and up and running and there would be no need for government funding, but we are not quite there yet. This is bridging that gap.

Caroline Ayre: Let us not victimise Sitka spruce, because it is an incredibly important species, and I do not think you could say now that there are woodlands that are purely one and not another delivering on natural capital or public benefit. We now operate modern forestry that is truly mixed. You need to get away from the perception of monoculture. You should also understand that those wood products lock up carbon in perpetuity, and we often forget that the carbon does not just stop at the forest gate. We make products out of those, and it is often forgotten.

The Chair: Of course, absolutely.

Q67 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** It is quite easy to see that there will be a carbon market. There is already a carbon market, and there will be other markets to do with water quality, where there is a commercial operation going on and there is a transfer of value in different ways. There is also a market in access, but the one I get stumped by is the biodiversity thing. Is there a biodiversity market for the future, or will we have to have substitute grants and public support for that rather than seeing it going towards a market?

Dr Darren Moorcroft: The risk of the market model for biodiversity is perhaps stronger than it is for water quality or the like, because it is much more challenging to actively measure. Part of where government has a role in public money for public goods is in underpinning some of the things that we know are societal benefits, and biodiversity is one. The challenge is that if there is a means by which it gets monetised, it almost gets put alongside certain things. You might say that it is more important to lock up carbon versus saving nature, but we know that both those

things are fundamentally important. The ecological crisis that we face will unfortunately probably dwarf the climate crisis that we face, so we must tackle both together. Therefore, my concern is that we pit them against each other in a marketplace.

Caroline Ayre: It is not a question that I can answer, but certainly, under the EWCO, biodiversity, lower and higher, has had a significant take-up in delivery.

Stephanie Rhodes: It has. The additional contribution to the England woodland creation offer—high and low biodiversity—had a significant uptake. Interestingly, talking about future biodiversity markets, proposers are keeping an eye on the upcoming biodiversity net gain market. Not yet known is how rapidly it will develop or what type of funding will be available, bearing in mind that this is a market for compensation for damage that will have happened elsewhere. It is a different market from the carbon market or the flood mitigation market, but it is certainly one that is arousing lots of interest among proposers.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: It links to the question earlier about destroying ancient woodland and planting new saplings. That is where biodiversity net gain falls down, from our perspective. You cannot destroy something that is irreplaceable and think that you can then replace it.

The Chair: Indeed.

Q68 **The Earl of Leicester:** What is your assessment of the value of wilding and rewilding activities and woodland and forestry expansion schemes in green belts or countryside around towns, if indeed you have any view?

Sir William Worsley: I did some rewilding on my farm about 25 years ago, so I have some experience of it. Do you mean specifically on the green-belt urban-fringe area, not generally?

The Earl of Leicester: Exactly. There is room for rewilding out in the sticks, but how about right next to towns and green belts?

Sir William Worsley: My feeling is that it has a very valuable place, because it gives health and well-being access, that sort of thing. The risk when we talk about wilding or rewilding is that we are just making an excuse for neglect. Wilded and rewilded land needs managing and it is expensive, so do not think that this is an easy way of ticking a box. Also, unless there is a seed source nearby you will not get much tree cover. This land that I wilded 25 years ago is next to a wood, yet it only has about 30% tree cover. It was arable land that I stopped farming before wilding became trendy. I did it as an experiment to see what would happen. I found it fascinating and I loved it. After a bit, we fenced it and we run Exmoor ponies for about three weeks a year, so it is very lightly grazed.

It has its place on the urban fringe if it can be put in the right place as part of a mix. The mix of land management is important, and the benefit has to do with health and well-being. I have always been a huge

champion of community forestry, because it is about bringing trees to people as opposed to people to trees. There is something special about being able to walk from your house to a walk in a wood or a wilded area, as opposed to getting into a car and driving for half an hour to get to somewhere for a walk. I am supportive of it, but it has a place. It is not the answer.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: The biggest barrier is its terminology. It means certain things to certain people and they have a certain reaction. For us, from a forestry perspective, it is about natural regeneration and natural colonisation, so it is a good way of establishing woodland in certain places. It is good to see that the Forestry Commission scheme now recognises the landowners' ability to make use of it. We would like the uptake to be slightly greater, so it might need a bit more promotion because of the terminology issue. We know and recognise that the mechanism itself delivers specific benefits for nature via the very means by which you are creating it.

As William says, it needs a seed source and it needs management. It is not simply a question of waiting and hoping for the best, but having it close to people. That is important. You would expect me to say that as an organisation with 1,200 woods, most of which are within a stone's throw of people, primarily because when you think about the natural capital value—Sir Dieter Helm did a piece of work in which he mapped where you would place new woodlands—the heat map is very closely aligned with urban conurbations, and the best place to put woodland in England and across the UK is close to people, exactly because of what Sir William says. You want people to have woods on their doorstep, not to have to go searching for them, and we saw that through the pandemic.

Caroline Ayre: I suppose all I would ask is that those woodlands close to communities are also useful and have a purpose besides recreation. Cultivating a wood culture is much needed. We do not have a society that necessarily understands where their wood comes from. In fact, they do not. It could be a great example of bringing the community into managing and owning their own woodlands, and knowing that they can also produce, alongside all the other wonderful things that they deliver.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: Some of our best sites do that, but I would say that they need another purpose, rather than just a purpose, because recreation, access and nature are purposes in themselves.

Stephanie Rhodes: I want to build a bit on Caroline's point about engagement. That is one of the challenges when taking natural colonisation approaches. It takes a bit longer, and it is sometimes more challenging to engage communities on something that will take longer to establish. At the same time, there is absolutely a place for it, and I take up the challenge. We need to ensure that the current offer is sufficiently promoted. Without a shadow of a doubt, there are benefits in bringing the woodland to the people, as William put it. We have been able to quantify the health benefit of being able to see woodland from your

window before you even step into it. Forest Research has quantified that and it is mind-boggling, so we will definitely carry on working on that.

The Earl of Leicester: That is all admirable, and I totally agree with what you said, Steph, but we also must recognise that in so doing we will not get the biodiversity that we expect from woodland that is further from human habitation because of disturbance and people's penchant for walking dogs off leads and such like. I am afraid that biodiversity will be compromised.

Q69 **The Chair:** William, you mentioned community forests. Do you have good examples of where that has worked?

Sir William Worsley: Yes, there are some very good examples in the Manchester City of Trees, Mersey Forest and the National Forest in the Midlands. There are some wonderful examples in the urban environment. I remember being up in Manchester and looking at a wonderful tree-lined street. I turned round the other way and there was not a single tree. The houses were exactly the same. They were all turn of the 20th century brick, rather unattractive houses. One side looked prosperous and affluent and the other side looked terrible, and they were exactly the same housing estate. The benefit that those trees had brought to that particular area of Manchester was interesting. There are lots of examples. I think the community forests have been a great success story. They have fought hard to survive, not being particularly well funded. They are much more in fashion now than they have been for quite a long time, but there are lots of great examples.

The Chair: Perhaps you could drop us a line to highlight those.

Sir William Worsley: I am very happy to do that.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: We run a landscape programme with the community forests, some of which William has mentioned, such as the Northern Forest, which runs from Liverpool to Hull, with the ambition for 50 million new trees to be established in 25 years. I think the real opportunity there is to link the planting that happens in people's streets all the way up the hill. We have great examples. We have an estate, Smithills Estate, that literally backs on to Bolton, and we are able to see very diverse communities joining us on that site but also what they are doing in their own community through the outreach work that we do alongside the community forests. That generates a connection with nature and trees that the other parts of the UK could benefit from replicating.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Q70 **Lord Goddard of Stockport:** A simple question, but do we really need a land use strategy? I have been in politics for 45 years, and if I had 1,000 trees for every strategy we have ever seen, you would all be out of work, because the place would be covered with trees. How would the overarching strategy help to deliver a better use for outcomes for forestry, and woodlands together? Would having unified spatial

frameworks at different scales help to manage the trade-off between the tree planting, the woodlands and other restoration projects? It is about putting all that together, and will one overarching strategy be the answer?

Caroline Ayre: Can I ask what a unified spatial framework is?

Lord Goddard of Stockport: We have spatial frameworks now being put together by local authorities up and down the country—some successful, some less successful. It is all about looking at heat maps, which were just mentioned. You need things where conurbations are. I come from Stockport. That 65% green belt is the borough, and we have that exact problem. I have council estates that do not have a tree, and less than 1,000 metres away there is a wood. It is about that balance and interaction. It seems to me that more people say that they do not like spatial planning because it interrupts the natural order of farming and woodland, and "We know best" if you like, but that spatial planning is coming because of the need for more homes and more interaction with nature. It is coming, it is political, and it is not something that people should shy away from.

Sir William Worsley: I think that a spatial strategy could help to alleviate some administrative pinch points, but we must remember that the land in this country is owned by lots of different people, lots of different institutions, lots of different NGOs and so on. You are not looking at one ownership. There are great examples of partnerships working. The Northumberland Woodland Creation Partnership, which was launched recently, is a good example of getting all the relevant organisations together around a table to discuss the issues and to come up with plans but from a consultative partnership point of view. That is bottom up as opposed to top down. I would be very worried about a top-down strategy dictating, because I do not think it would work.

There are other very good examples, such as national parks and particularly AONBs that work with the land managers in their areas, not dictating to people but trying to get them working together and thinking together. But it is a huge challenge getting people to do that. I am afraid that people in the land management sector are not necessarily great partnership players. Yes, I can see some benefits, but it is much better trying to get people to work together in a consultative way to engage with people—local government engaging with the private sector, landowners and land managers—to try to get it right. There are better ways of doing it.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: The short answer to your question is yes, because it should be the start of the conversation, not the end of it. If we do not start the conversation, we end up with probably 140,000 businesses and landowners making their own individual decisions. From a strategic point of view, we know that there is only a finite amount of land, we know what is needed or what it is capable of delivering, but we just stay in the same place if we do not start the conversation. There is a real need for us to fast track that start of the conversation, but we need

to do it with caution and do it well. I agree with William that those who hear the conversation will see it as a threat rather than an opportunity. Therefore, we need to have that conversation in a way that is productive and positive and creates more light than heat.

Caroline Ayre: I agree. Being involved in the development of ELMs for the last four or five years has been a very frustrating process, because there is no unified understanding of what our land can deliver. It is very much hot-spotting of policy and of strategies. I absolutely agree with Darren that we should have a strategy as a starting point and then work up to what the support should look like across a resilient landscape.

Stephanie Rhodes: As Caroline is saying, that conversation should start to look across what we currently have. Currently we have a slightly siloed planning system that looks at the built environment, and other land uses, but we need to start to look across, because we are working across a finite amount of land, and we could set something that could be presumptive but certainly not prescriptive.

Q71 **The Chair:** Picking up on the phrase William used, "top down will not work", it is probably true in England with our landowners and their castles, but is there a need for a framework? Is there a need to go beyond just a dictatorial Government saying, "You should do this"? Is there a need to agree to a framework for land use, and what is the role for legislation within that? Darren suggested that we need to toughen up our regulatory standards.

Sir William Worsley: When I talk about top down, I am talking about Westminster. There is much more sense in a local/regional scale. I recently sat on the North Yorkshire Rural Commission, which put forward a very far-reaching report last July.

The Chair: Is that the one chaired by the Bishop of Ripon?

Sir William Worsley: The Dean of Ripon. It is well worth looking at. It has some quite interesting recommendations in it. One of the things that it set out was the need for leadership. That is important, but it is about getting people together and working in a partnership rather than a diktat. From a Forestry Commission point of view, having areas prioritised for afforestation would help us enormously, but it is not easy to achieve because you have lots of different interests. That is why I used the Northumberland Woodland Creation Partnership as an example of a way to try to achieve this. This is a new initiative. It is led by Northumberland County Council, and it has all the relevant stakeholders involved in it and around the table. I am quite optimistic that it will be a success, particularly on tree planting.

Caroline Ayre: We have one in Cornwall as well: Forest for Cornwall. There is a suite of Woodland Creation Partnerships. We used to have something called the Regional Forestry Frameworks back in the day when we had ~~the~~ Regional Development Agencies. They were very successful in

bringing together all the interested parties, albeit forestry focused. We had that dialogue and discussion at the local level and it worked.

Q72 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** Most of the examples you have given have the word "forest" or "woodland" in them. What would you see as the challenge of expanding that collaborative dialogue-based process to multipurpose land uses, or will that fall over under its own weight?

Sir William Worsley: I used areas of outstanding natural beauty as an example of the sort of thing where I think it can work. It tends to be consultative, about working with people and relationship development. I am involved with the Howardian Hills AONB. It is a relatively small AONB, so it makes it easier to engage with all the people on the ground.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: We had the AONB people in front of us and they wanted more powers.

Sir William Worsley: Of course they did.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: Centrally we can say what the opportunities are, and so start to open people's minds to the different types of land use that that land could fulfil. At the moment, what is potentially missing at the local level is the national perspective on what that area could deliver, so those landowners will be missing out on opportunity because it will not be at the forefront of their minds. It is not top down and it is not bottom up; it is about making sure that the two things are talking to each other in a way that means that every decision is as well informed as it can be.

Q73 **Lord Grantchester:** I was intrigued that Sir William asked this question himself when he asked, "How do we find the land?" From your experiences in the forestry sector, how can we improve the processes of planning management and decision-making for future land use in England? Following on from that, what are the drivers? What organisation or organisations would be best placed to plan and decide on the allocation of land for the various competing agendas for land use in England? A nice easy one to finish with.

Sir William Worsley: That is a really nice, easy one, Lord Grantchester. Thank you very much for that as a nice finishing question. I will stick to forestry, because that is what we are about. One of the great things about having the Forestry Commission is that it is an organisation that can do something about that. There is no doubt that we as an organisation need to sharpen up our operation and perform more speedily. We are doing quite a lot to address exactly that at the moment, but it is also about relationships with fellow organisations, particularly Natural England for example, and we have done a lot to do that. It is about engaging.

I used the Northumberland Woodland Creation Partnership as an example before, and I will use it again. The purpose of that was to get the local authority to take leadership, but to get all the stakeholders around the table so that decisions could be made before applications were put in, so

that people could have guidance as to what was likely to be suitable and what was likely not to be.

There is quite a lot that can be done. With regard to the agricultural sector, I do not think I will go there. You have Defra. It is bigger and more complex, but in the forestry sector you have an organisation that can give that sort of leadership.

Caroline Ayre: My members from the nursery sector all the way through the supply chain to processing would argue that it needs to be simplified and that there needs to be ministerial guidance and leadership on land use decisions. If we want trees, we need to get trees in the ground. Jim Mackinnon did a review of the processes and the regulatory system in Scotland, which resulted in planting rates going up because they looked across the suite. I doubt that will happen in England. Decision-making is far too long and complicated in England, which is why investors are investing in Scotland, without a doubt.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: It is in the nature of the question that there are multiple players with an interest in what any piece of land does. We need a cross-government perspective, probably at ministerial level, on how land should be allocated and what it is capable of delivering. It needs a secretariat with an insight that links to things like the nature Green Paper and the Environment Act and the targets in that. We know that certain land uses can happen only in certain places, so they are the simple ones. We know where the peat is, we know where the ancient woodlands are, so we can make decisions that are born out of good data and good information.

A decision about competing options must be made at a very high level within government, but it has to be taken in Defra, the Department for Levelling Up, BEIS and so on, because without that we are just splinters.

Caroline Ayre: I agree.

Lord Grantchester: Thank you. I was going to comment that in different areas of activity, housing or whatever, there are various local networks that build up. It is almost as if a network has to build up to help us for forestry and land use and other competing land uses. It does not appear to be a structure as such at the moment, but maybe those relationships will help to build up something for the future. Do you agree with that reflection from the end of our discussions today?

Sir William Worsley: I have made the point right the way through about the importance of partnerships, of working together, of engaging right across the board. That is extremely important. I am sitting here with a forestry hat on. As I said, I am also a farmer, and land management is all about trying to get the balance right. If we are to meet the Government's planting challenge, we need to do it in partnership with a whole lot of other people, organisations and so on. We work very closely with the Woodland Trust, as an example, and with Confor. We work with lots of different organisations, because that

partnership, that working together, is how we will achieve it and get it right.

Land management is not black and white. There are myriad shades of grey, and we must try to do it as well as we can. We need to get multipurpose woods planted that are producing productive timber, that are ticking all the boxes of wildlife, environment, landscape. Of course landscape is important, and we will put people off new planting if we do not get it right. It is about the health and well-being benefits. We have seen significant benefits there. It is about trying to get multifunctional woodlands planted that will be for the benefit of society in its very broadest sense.

Dr Darren Moorcroft: The background for protecting, restoring and creating new woodlands and new forestry has never been stronger, so the opportunity to shape that in the eyes of a public audience and a political audience, at a local level as well as at a national level, could not be stronger. The argument, whether it is about health and well-being, stopping people's houses being flooded, putting nature back to where it should be, capturing carbon and all those benefits, is that there is a greater awareness now than there has ever been for what forestry and woodlands can do. The opportunity to put that into a land use strategy seems to be a very sensible one for society as a whole.

Caroline Ayre: Forestry is as much about the people as it is about the trees, in my opinion. It is a wonderful, rewarding sector and it is very diverse to get into.

The Chair: We are at a unique point where farmers and land managers will be reviewing their options and making policy decisions, so we have an opportunity to influence this for the longer term, which is what this is about, of course.

You referred a number of times to Scotland and Wales, but perhaps more Scotland in that Scotland is a more attractive place to invest and they are getting it right or better than we are. It would be helpful if you could write in to explain why that is, and, if possible, what changes you would like to see introduced here so that we make England as attractive as Scotland to invest, and why, Caroline, the decision-making process takes far too long in England. How can we simplify that? It would be helpful if you could send us other information that you have and say whether the legislative structure is as it should be.

Caroline Ayre: We will.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed for the time you have spent. We have given you a very heavy interrogation and you have responded to it really well, so we very much appreciate your time. Thank you very much indeed.