

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Ancient woodlands, HC 1750

Wednesday 11 March 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 11 March 2026.

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Members present: Mr Toby Perkins (Chair); Olivia Blake; Julia Buckley; Jonathan Davies; Carla Denyer; Barry Gardiner; Alison Griffiths; Chris Hinchliff; Sojan Joseph; Dr Roz Savage; John Whitby; Sammy Wilson.

Questions 37-104

Witnesses

[II](#): Steve Knight, Independent Forester and Ecologist Consultant, Confederation of Forest Industries (Confor); Ian Tubby, Head of Policy and Advice, Forestry Commission; Dr Andrew Weatherall, Fellow, Institute of Chartered Foresters.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Steve Knight, Ian Tubby and Dr Andrew Weatherall.

Q37 **Chair:** Welcome back, everyone, to the second of the panel sessions today looking into ancient woodlands. We have a distinguished panel within the forestry sector for this second panel. I will ask the three panellists to introduce themselves, their organisation and who their organisation represents. I will start with you, Mr Knight.

Steve Knight: I am Steve Knight. I am an independent forester and ecology consultant representing Confor, which has several members across the country and across the industry, representing the forestry sector.

Chair: Just to be clear, your members are primarily harvesters of timber and within the wood industry.

Steve Knight: Not necessarily, but it is a large part of that. There are small woodland owners as part of that as well.

Chair: Wonderful, thank you very much. Mr Tubby.

Ian Tubby: Good afternoon. I am Ian Tubby. I head up the policy and advice team at the Forestry Commission. The Forestry Commission is a non-departmental Government body, underpinned by the Forestry Act. We balance woodland creation and maintaining adequate reserves of standing trees and timber with conservation of flora, fauna and the landscape. There are three bits to our organisation: Forestry England does the exciting stuff, looking after the nation's forests. It has about 220,000 hectares of forests, including 43,000 hectares of plantations and ancient woodland sites. Forest research provides us with the evidence base on which we make policy and delivery decisions, and then forest services—the bit that I am in—does the regulation and incentivises woodland creation and management in England.

Chair: Excellent, thank you very much. Dr Weatherall.

Dr Weatherall: Thanks for the invitation to be here. I am representing the Institute of Chartered Foresters. That is a professional body for forestry and woodland conservation, so it is a cross-sectoral body. I sit on its environmental special interest group. My day job is with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. In both organisations, I am interested in ancient woodland protection and management.

Q38 **Chair:** Starting with Dr Weatherall, how can ancient woodlands be managed to best preserve and enhance their environmental benefits?

Dr Weatherall: The key challenge—it has already been talked about in the first session—is resilience. The key thing for management is



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improvement in condition. We have heard already that only 9% of our woodlands are in good condition. Improvement will include things such as rewetting environments in some cases, increasing the number of rarer tree species so that there is greater diversity, and deer and grey squirrel management.

Q39 Chair: What about you, Mr Tubby? Is there anything that you would add in terms of how we best manage ancient woodlands?

Ian Tubby: I think there is an economic element to this as well. For many owners to be motivated to manage their woodland, they need an economic incentive. When it comes to hardwood, markets for hardwood are very limited. There are only about 1 million tonnes or so harvested in England, and nearly all of that goes to firewood and biomass markets. Those markets are underpinning the management of broadleaf woodland in England. It would be great to see additional markets opened up for that. That is something we are trying to do.

If there is not opportunity with timber markets, we—as somebody alluded to in the previous session—need to find other ways of making it economically desirable to manage woodland. That could be CSR-type investments from the corporate sector—carbon, water quality and biodiversity units. Some economic return to owners will help encourage the responsible management of woodlands longer term.

Q40 Chair: That brings us nicely on to you, Mr Knight. From the perspective of your members, can you lay out for us the efforts that they are making to protect ancient woodlands, and how that economic benefit model works alongside the need for preservation of ancient woodland?

Steve Knight: Ancient woodland is a generic term, but we have already understood that it is a mixture of broadleaf and conifer. Each of those will be managed in a different way. Part of the process for the protection is the planning of those. Typically, most large woodlands will have a management plan, which would have indicated that some things are ancient woodland, so they would have been protected and managed. If it is a PAW site, they would have been assessed, and a management plan would have been drawn up for long-term restoration. If they are smaller woodlands, they perhaps would have gone through the felling licence process, and, again, that would have been picked up through that process as a regulatory matter. In terms of protection, the legal framework is there already. Additional to that, most large forestry owners might be signed up to a certification scheme—UKWAS certification—as well, which would have also highlighted those aspects of protection and restoration on PAW sites.

However, the economics of those are very different, in terms of broadleaf and conifer. Unfortunately, across the country you can see that a lot of the low-economic-return broadleaves are not being worked as much as they should be to encourage the resilience of those ancient woodlands.

Q41 Chair: When you say that they are not worked enough, what do you mean by that?



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Steve Knight: Quite a lot of small ancient woodlands are difficult to work because of accessibility, and the cost and the economics fail to work.

Chair: I am sorry, I am not absolutely clear on what you mean by working. Do you mean felling? Could you expand?

Steve Knight: Let's say management. In order to manage a woodland, to encourage that woodland to regenerate and become resilient, you typically have to fell some trees.

Chair: If we are talking about felling trees, just say that—that is fine.

Steve Knight: Fine, okay.

Chair: By working, you mean that we are not felling enough of those trees because of the economics of it.

Steve Knight: Yes. Largely, economics come into that, and the markets drive those economics.

Q42 **Alison Griffiths:** I am going to focus on Mr Tubby and Dr Weatherall, because I think that you have answered some of this already, Mr Knight, but feel free to come in on it too.

For plantations on ancient woodland sites, what stops us going beyond management, and restoring them to something more like ancient and semi-natural woodland? For the PAW sites, is the lower biodiversity there a reason for their restoration?

Ian Tubby: In terms of barriers to restoration, and taking the conifer off and replacing it with native species, a lot of it is economics. We have some evidence that the asset value of a restored woodland is lower than the asset value of a woodland stocked with conifer. If you are a private woodland owner and you are depending on the return from your land, that will be a factor.

In addition to the capital value, there is also the revenue from timber sales. The conifer market, or softwood market, functions very well—there is strong demand for softwood. A rotation length of a conifer crop, if you are clear felling, may be around 40 years. If you are moving to a continuous cover system, you will have “little and often” returns, and you can go and harvest regularly. If you clear the conifer and re-establish native broadleaves, they grow more slowly, so their rotation length might be 100 years before you get a return on that investment. In some parts of the country, grey squirrels make it very difficult to grow good-quality broadleaf trees so that the owner can then sell them to sawmills to make longer-lived products, hence why the firewood market is so important.

An awful lot of this is dependent on economics. For the smaller fragments of woodland that we heard about in the previous session—3.5 hectares and smaller—it is very difficult to make those woodlands pay, unless you start working with your neighbours. So I would say that economics is one of the biggest barriers to this.



Dr Weatherall: I agree with my colleagues about the economic factors. It would be astonishing if we expected private landowners and businesses to make choices that had adverse financial impacts for them. This is about market failure to deliver non-market value, biodiversity, carbon and other benefits, so I would look at Government and private finance initiatives as the way to overcome this.

We are in a nature and climate emergency. The Government have biodiversity targets, some of which are through the environmental improvement plan, so the mechanism should not fall on to the private sector, but be supported in some way to achieve our ambitions for the restoration and improvement in condition of ancient woods. Economics underlies it, but the solutions do not lie solely with the private sector.

Q43 **Alison Griffiths:** Before I move on, Mr Knight, was there anything you wanted to add to the previous answers, or to your own previous answer?

Steve Knight: It is easy to lump conifer PAWS as just being dense conifer that destroys ancient woodlands, but in terms of the scale of different types of habitat possible on PAWS, you can have some sites where you have wide, open space and timber conifer such as Douglas or larch, with a functioning ecosystem of broadleaf within that and underneath.

The extremes of what we call PAWS are different in terms of value to biodiversity, how much you would restore and how much you would need to restore. It is possible to have a balance in some circumstances, where you can do both timber production through conifer and biodiversity restoration. Sometimes, the conifer-broadleaf mix that is being worked—where trees can be felled commercially—will be in better ecological condition than neglected, pure broadleaf woodlands that are not being felled or managed.

Q44 **Alison Griffiths:** That is very helpful nuance, thank you. Mr Tubby, do you think that the scope and delivery of the Forestry Commission's targets for the restoration of ancient woodland are driving the right outcomes?

Ian Tubby: Yes, but slower than we had hoped. Forestry England has committed to restoring all of its PAWS restoration and has started work on that, but as we heard in the previous session, it could take decades for full restoration to be achieved.

We have perhaps the primary challenge in the private sector: engaging all of those owners of woodland who are not currently managing their woodland at all. A proportion of them own ancient woodland that they are not managing, so one of our first jobs is to try to increase the proportion of woodland under management in general in England. We then need to go further in the restoration of ancient woodlands and target those woodlands where we can.

Grants are available to help woodland owners to do that, and we are beginning to see some uptake. Around 2,100 hectares of PAWS restoration grant has been taken up over the last two or three years, and we expect that to grow, but it ultimately comes back to the economic point and



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understanding why ancient woodland was cleared and plantations were established in the first place, whether those plantations were oak, beech, spruce or pine. It was because those old woodlands were not as economically productive as they might have been, and Government policy was to increase production and productivity. The private sector responded to that.

We have to address that without penalising owners who acted in good faith decades ago, did their job and increased timber supply and availability. We have to encourage them to restore but, as my colleague said, there are degrees of restoration. What do we mean by restoration? We have lost elm in the landscape and we are losing ash. They were really important components of those ancient woodlands.

Q45 Alison Griffiths: You mentioned speeds at the very beginning of your answer, which I thought was perceptive. What would you prioritise to shift the dial on the speed of change?

Ian Tubby: In terms of overall benefits to biodiversity and woodland resilience, I would like us first to increase the overall area or proportion of woodland in active management. If all the owners were able to thin their woodlands just a little bit more, harvest more trees and shoot a few more deer, that would really benefit our biodiversity, the structure of the woodland and its ability to naturally regenerate. That would be my fix-all. Then I would like to further promote the grants that are available to owners of plantations on ancient woodland sites.

Q46 Chair: We heard from the previous panel the extent to which deer are one of the causes of damage. What is the landscape for a woodland owner currently? What should be requested in terms of deer management and shooting deer effectively?

Ian Tubby: Over the last two or three years, we have begun to see a real change in the overall approach to deer management at landscape scale. We have two native species of deer and four introduced species of deer; each represents its own challenges and does different types of damage. To deal with large herding species such as fallow, we need to encourage landscape-scale control involving collaboration between owners. Natural England is involved in a successful pilot in Sussex that is bringing nearly 40 owners together to try to control deer across that landscape. If you end up with just one or two owners culling deer on their land, you will not make a big impact on the population overall.

The recently published Government deer management policy statement set out some changes to licensing arrangements. We have been looking at what is happening in Scotland. My colleagues at Natural England have made it easier to obtain a licence for shooting deer at night. That, combined with changes in technology such as night vision and thermal sights, should help us to increase humane deer culling.

In combination with that, we are trying to increase demand for venison. Keith said that we need to eat more venison, and we absolutely do. It is a free-range, healthy meat. We also need a disposal route for stalkers who



shoot the deer. They need to be able to move the carcase on and we should be making use of that carcase. We are promoting the British quality wild venison standard and working with accredited game-handling establishments and other organisations to make better use of this natural product, and thereby reduce the environmental and economic damage done to woodlands and agriculture.

Chair: Dr Weatherall, did you want to contribute?

Dr Weatherall: Yes, because I can see Guy's and St Thomas's out the window over the Thames, which serves wild venison to patients, doctors and visitors. That is a fantastic initiative that we need to see more of. That would really prime it—if we increase demand, the supply becomes more economical. I think that would hit the Government's growth agenda as well. I encourage the Committee to take a field trip, eat some wild venison and speak to doctors and patients.

Chair: We give a lot of thought to the food we put in front of this Committee. We will put venison on the menu.

Q47 **Julia Buckley:** You have already touched on deer management, and you made an articulate case about the economic threat to our woodlands. We were glad to see you observing the previous panel. Do you agree with their assessments of the threats facing ancient woodlands and how they can be addressed? I will start with Dr Weatherall.

Dr Weatherall: Yes, I agree. They talked comprehensively about the threats of climate change—drought, flooding, wildfire and the associated rise in pests and diseases—as well as deer, grey squirrels and, of course, the development threats. I perhaps differ from some of their comments on buffering. I see buffering as an opportunity for natural colonisation from the seed source. We cannot create new ancient woodlands, but the next best thing is expansion around them via natural processes.

Evidence suggests that within 100 metres of those ancient woodlands, in about 20 years we can get about 100 stems per hectare across a range of habitat types, so I would push strongly for the buffer zone to be 100 metres. Also, if land use change is going to happen in those areas, the default should be towards woodland expansion through natural colonisation, which can actually contribute to the tree cover expansion targets that the Government are trying to achieve.

Julia Buckley: That is really helpful, thank you. Mr Tubby?

Ian Tubby: Yes, I would love to see all those fragments of ancient woodlands, all those 3.5-hectare spots around the countryside, expanded to 10 hectares. That would really benefit the core ancient woodland in the middle, help to meet Government woodland creation targets and, hopefully also, start to join some of those fragments up into larger and more robust and resilient woodlands. That would be my starting point.

Q48 **Julia Buckley:** Are you suggesting that if the woodlands have more of a critical mass, a larger size, additional benefits accrue from them?



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Ian Tubby: Yes.

Julia Buckley: Okay. And you, Mr Knight?

Steve Knight: To my mind, deer are the largest threat at the moment in terms of condition, and grey squirrels also, because you can plant trees, or the trees might regenerate, but come to 15 years and then the squirrels destroy them. Those two go together really.

Species diversity in woodlands—tree and vegetative diversity—is important. Having a monocultural broadleaf-type woodlands is going to be an issue, as much as it is with conifer, particularly as climate change, pests and diseases are becoming more problematic. We might have to consider having a large range of broadleaf that are non-native to buffer some of these woodlands in order to allow that critical mass that you were talking about.

Q49 **Julia Buckley:** Are you suggesting that the definitions should be made wider in order to make that more feasible?

Steve Knight: Not necessarily definitions, but be a bit more mindful that there may be cases where it might be acceptable to have some non-natives to help buffer the natives.

Q50 **Julia Buckley:** So a mix.

Steve Knight: Yes, a mix. For resilience in any type of woodland, having species diversity is always key.

Q51 **Julia Buckley:** Between you, you have suggested what feels like targets or minimum thresholds, which feels like a proposal that could be fed to Government in our report, but you also were very clear at the start that this is an economic issue of businesses. How do we persuade businesses by adding more regulation? How do we crack that nut?

Steve Knight: I do not think that adding more regulation is the way forward. Because of the economics, if a woodland is truly not economic to work and we want it make progress, some sort of funding stream is needed. The issue in the private sector with the funding streams that have been available is that they are usually all tied up with other things that we have to do as well. There may be scope for having something like a small grant scheme, as in Wales, that has actual targets to deal with ancient woodland restoration, so you do not have to do all those other add-ons for it.

Q52 **Julia Buckley:** So separate specific grant schemes, replicating successful ones in Wales. Did you want to come in, Dr Weatherall?

Dr Weatherall: Yes, thank you. We should try to keep an eye on the big picture and the scale of ancient woodlands here. They cover only about 2.5% of the land and are probably about a quarter of the total closed canopy woodland cover that we have. In terms of Government objectives, a key objective at the moment is 30by30, but in DEFRA's own assessment, we are less than 6% of the way towards that with four and a bit years to go. Of that 2.5% of ancient woodlands, only 16% have SSSI status, the



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highest level of protection that we have. We need a paradigm shift in the level of their protection and in the biodiversity targets that we aim for with them. That is about Government support, really looking at the private finance initiative, and trying to get the best terrestrial habitats for biodiversity that we have into better forms of protection. If that is not something that the market can deliver, we have to look at different ways of achieving it, but we are running out of time on this stuff.

Q53 Julia Buckley: So it is as much about protecting what we already have with those financial subsidies as it is about growing and expanding.

Dr Weatherall: I think we need both. I support the need for more timber in England, so new woodland creation should include an element of that, but ancient woodlands are the best we have. We do not have primary forest in this country. We did our deforestation long before it became fashionable, unfortunately. We really have to think about that protection and there are Government targets around this, as I say.

Q54 Julia Buckley: It is just about the funding following the action plan to match the policy?

Dr Weatherall: Yes.

Q55 Chris Hinchliff: My questions relate primarily to planning policy protection. I will focus on you, Dr Weatherall, but if other members of the panel want to come in please feel free. We recently had a debate in Westminster Hall about the value of our woodlands, and many people there spoke about how great our ancient woodlands are. There was a lot of lip service, if you like, paid to that, but we have been told in written evidence from the Woodland Trust that over 1,000 woodlands are under threat from development across the UK. From your perspective, do you feel that our planning policy protections for these ancient woodlands are adequate?

Dr Weatherall: On paper, they are adequate. There was discussion in the previous session about how they are interpreted. Ancient woodlands are categorised as irreplaceable habitats, so they should be affected only if there are wholly exceptional circumstances, but it is very difficult to determine the interpretation of that across the country. It should be about really big projects.

I am going to be controversial and touch on the infamous bat tunnel that cost £100 million. The reason for the bat tunnel is that it is right next door to Sheephouse wood, which is an ancient SSSI woodland. If some buffering had taken place so that the line went slightly further out—say another 100 metres, as I suggested—the bat tunnel would not have been necessary. Having serious protections for our most precious habitats can help with some of this stuff.

Q56 Chris Hinchliff: DEFRA recently published a review of the implementation of the planning protections afforded to ancient woodland in the NPPF and found that, "Almost half of applications were approved without a proper assessment of possible loss or deterioration and without mitigation



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measures in place to avoid negative impacts” to the ancient woodland and ancient veteran trees.

We often hear in Parliament about the balance between growth and protections for nature, and it is often said that the two can go hand in hand. I appreciate that this is a veteran tree rather than ancient woodland, but look at the fate of the Cubbington pear, for example: voted as tree of the year and then promptly cut down to make way for HS2. Do you feel that we are just saying the right things, but when it comes down to it development ultimately wins through—that what is on paper stays on paper, but the reality is that the development always takes priority?

Dr Weatherall: Yes, but I am hopeful that things like the recent public outcry about tree losses will help to refocus things. As I say, on paper is one thing, but it is about the follow through—rhetoric to reality. Some of that involves a training element across the country to make sure that people understand how to protect and value those ancient trees and woodlands. I am cautiously optimistic.

Q57 **Chris Hinchliff:** That is good to hear. This is in the context of planning policy, which has experienced quite significant upheaval—some might say deregulation. Do you have any concerns that the changes in planning policy will put more ancient woodland at risk?

Dr Weatherall: I am not a planning expert so I am going to say that I hope not, but I am not close enough to that to answer. Maybe one of my colleagues has a view on that.

Q58 **Chris Hinchliff:** Would anyone else on the panel like to comment on the changes in planning policy and whether they will put any additional ancient woodland at risk?

Steve Knight: I do not know enough about it, but what I will say is that I understand that the size at which you now will not need to have an assessment is quite small. I am not sure what impact that will have on the larger scale ancient woodland sites.

Ian Tubby: Although the national planning policy framework sets out a reasonable level of protection for ancient woodland, describing it as “irreplaceable habitat”, one improvement we would perhaps like to see considered is increasing the buffers between woodland and new development. At the moment, I think that is 15 metres or so, which is a pretty narrow strip. There is a need to differentiate between the direct losses associated with development, which are relatively small for ancient woodland, and the indirect additional pressure that new developments could put on ancient woodlands: people tipping their grass cuttings over the hedge; more access, whether legal or illegal, into the neighbouring woodland; and the impact of pets trampling on the woodland soil and ground-nesting birds and so on. All those factors, although slightly indirect, can have an impact on ancient woodland and other woodland habitats. We would not be averse to looking at increasing the buffer size.

Q59 **Chris Hinchliff:** Thank you. Coming straight back to you, Mr Tubby, I



think for many people in this country, the iconic image in our mind of the ancient woodland may well be Wistman's wood—one of our temperate rainforests and a remaining fragment of that particular type of ancient woodland. Would you agree with the campaigners who have been calling for specific protections for temperate rainforests? We have already heard about the low proportion of ancient woodland under SSSI protection; the same is true especially of our temperate rainforests and the fragments we have of them. What is your perspective on that?

Ian Tubby: I don't know too much about that specific campaign. I think we need to consider very carefully adding additional layers of protection on woodlands. I certainly have experience of talking to woodland owners who say, "We manage this woodland over here, and it looks great," but they are concerned about doing the wrong thing on the SSSI-designated part of the woodland. Additional protection needs to be thought through really carefully. If additional protection is added, we will need to help people manage their woodlands and ensure that they thrive long term.

We also need to be careful of how the word "protection" is used when it comes to climate change adaptation. We are so reliant on a tiny handful of species. Research suggests that even established woodlands now are reducing the ability to naturally regenerate because of climate change and deer. We need to be really careful about adding additional protection, and perhaps we should actually think about making it easier for owners to manage their woodland more appropriately.

Chair: Thank you. Barry Gardiner.

Q60 **Barry Gardiner:** Where to start? Dr Weatherall, perhaps I can start with you. You talked about the importance of financial incentive. I think it has been very clear from the panel that we have an asset value and, if you like, a natural capital value. You suggested that there might be small grants available to incentivise private landowners to move more towards the natural capital value. Would you like that to be one of the recommendations that the Committee might make?

Dr Weatherall: Yes, I would. I appreciate that my colleague has said that grants are available and there is some take-up, but I believe that the current budget is £1 billion for tree cover expansion or forestry, and we would like to see some proportion of that focused on existing woodland management, especially for ancient woodland restoration.

Q61 **Barry Gardiner:** Great. That is really helpful; thank you. We understand that a large amount of timber plantations on ancient woodlands are due to be harvested over the next five years. Mr Tubby, could you tell us how you expect those sites to be harvested and replanted, and what environmental impact you think that will have?

Ian Tubby: I could not tell you with any confidence exactly how much woodland will be harvested in the next few years—

Q62 **Barry Gardiner:** But you are the Forestry Commission guy here, aren't you?



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Ian Tubby: I work in the Forestry Commission, but—

- Q63 **Barry Gardiner:** Article 8 of the Forestry Commission framework document says that you have the power to set out that data for the production and supply and timber, so I assume that the Forestry Commission has the data, whether you yourself have it here or not.

Ian Tubby: We absolutely publish softwood and hardwood availability forecasts, but what we don't know is exactly when a private landowner will choose to fell their woodlands. We do not have the authority to direct a landowner to fell their trees.

- Q64 **Barry Gardiner:** You do, actually. You have that power under section 12 of annexe 1 of the Forestry Commission framework document, which gives you the power to specify relevant projects and veto what landowners are doing, but you very rarely do that.

Ian Tubby: We are not enacting those at the moment. I think the only directions to fell that we provide at the moment are statutory plant health notices, which we issue to try to stop the spread of disease. If private owners wish to fell their trees, they have to apply for a felling licence, and we want to know exactly how they are going to restock those woodlands. At the moment, an owner is perfectly entitled to fell conifer on a plantation on an ancient woodland site and restock with conifer. They can do that—

- Q65 **Barry Gardiner:** They can, but you also have the power to stop them. That is my point.

Ian Tubby: We could, I think, perhaps, not grant a felling licence.

- Q66 **Barry Gardiner:** Or you could veto the project unless it incorporated building back with broadleaf and so on.

Ian Tubby: I think that would be quite detrimental to the message that we are trying to get out about more people trying to manage woodlands. If trees are being felled, the choice is clear fell or moving towards continuous cover forestry. Certainly, with plantation on ancient woodland sites, we would encourage people to slowly restore that woodland over a period of time, rather than go in, clear fell and restock, if that is possible.

- Q67 **Barry Gardiner:** Tell me how you go about incentivising them to do that before we get Dr Weatherall's small grant schemes more focused on the development of ancient woodland. Perhaps, Mr Knight, you can then come in with what I would call the commercial timber perspective. We all recognise that commercial timber and softwood forestry is really important too.

Ian Tubby: Okay, so the basics: to fell trees, you need a licence, so owners need to do that whatever. We encourage owners to produce a woodland management plan that sets out long-term objectives, and we provide grants to do that. We also provide grants for deer control, squirrel control and woodland improvement, and for restoration of plantation on ancient woodland sites. That is worth £275 a hectare a year. The grants are there, and we really hope people make use of them because we want



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to see more plantations on ancient woodland restored. That is the offer at the moment.

- Q68 **Barry Gardiner:** Just to get a commercial eye on that, in your view, Mr Knight, is that offer sufficient to incentivise most private woodland owners not to plant, or to restock with Sitka spruce and other softwoods?

Steve Knight: It is important to understand that there are many different owners, and each of them will have their own objectives.

Barry Gardiner: But financial considerations are important.

Steve Knight: Financial considerations are a large driver of that. We are talking potentially tens of millions of cubic meters of conifer on these sites, if they are to be removed. The grants only go so far. They stop at a point. You are replacing a very commercial, fast-rotation income with something perhaps much longer term. Will it give you what you require at the end of the big risk of a much longer rotation? There is a lot of risk. There are not enough financial incentives to do this at large scale, in my opinion.

- Q69 **Barry Gardiner:** I am trying to focus on the ancient woodlands that have softwood plantation on them that are likely to be felled in the next five years. Can you give us an idea of the scale? Roughly how many hectares are up for grabs in the next five years?

Steve Knight: I don't have those figures with me.

- Q70 **Barry Gardiner:** Mr Tubby, is that something the Forestry Commission or Natural England might have?

Ian Tubby: We know that there are 42,000 hectares of conifer on plantations on ancient woodland sites at the moment. I think only a few hundred hectares per year would be felled.

- Q71 **Barry Gardiner:** Our information was that a large amount of timber plantations on ancient woodland would be felled. They are due to be harvested because they are coming to maturity.

Ian Tubby: It is down to the private owner to decide.

- Q72 **Barry Gardiner:** Of course it is, but a private owner who is managing that crop will want to take it when it is mature and receive the benefits of their years of nurturing it.

Ian Tubby: Yes. I could not tell you today exactly how many of those hectares of conifer on PAWS have a felling licence already or are in management already. The larger estates will have management plans and will know when they are going to fell the trees. We heard from Nick that 50% of the ancient woodlands are 3.5 hectares or smaller. I imagine that an awful lot of those woodlands are not managed, so perhaps only a tiny proportion will be thinned or felled.

Steve Knight: To add to that, the plantations in the figures you are seeing are not necessarily all at maturity. Some might have been felled already and are now on the second rotation, so it will be another 40-plus



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years before they come to fruition. Looking at those figures as a whole, it is very difficult to say that there is that much land available and that those crops will all be felled.

- Q73 **Barry Gardiner:** It is my understanding that the information the Woodland Trust sent us suggested that—*[Interruption.]* Ah, there we go. I have started, so I will finish. The Woodland Trust estimates that “over 1,000 ancient woods are under direct threat from development across the UK and the Government’s planning agenda...looks set to worsen...existing planning objections.” Its evidence argued: “Over 1,000 AWs are under threat from development...a number which will increase dramatically...Stronger legal protections are needed”. It does not actually give me the figures—I wanted something that gave me the figures. What are the barriers to using methods such as continuous cover forestry for timber plantations to protect ancient woodlands? Is it simply the commercial viability or are there other reasons?

Steve Knight: There are a lot of other reasons. Each site has its own unique features that will make it difficult to transfer to continuous cover-type forestry.

- Q74 **Barry Gardiner:** But they do this successfully elsewhere around the world. Why do we find it so difficult in this country when other countries do not?

Steve Knight: The economic model in this country drives a lot of the answers to why we do not do it.

- Q75 **Barry Gardiner:** Please explain. What have we got wrong with our economic model—if I can put it that way—that means that in other countries it makes economic sense to do that, but it does not over here?

Steve Knight: I think it is the timescale of the income generation. Clear fell is much shorter, so the return is quicker. Although you have to have more cost up front, you can generate a big lump of income over a shorter period. Continuous cover tends to be more difficult to manage on some sites, so the cost of managing it can sometimes be—

- Q76 **Barry Gardiner:** You are giving me what I asked for the other way around, in effect. I am asking what gives us a problem. Mr Tubby, you want to come in.

Ian Tubby: A lot of European countries have far more forest cover than us. In England, half of the woodlands in the environment are less than 100 years old. You have the starting point of an even-aged forest resource—well, an awful lot of our forest resource is even-aged, including a large proportion of plantations on ancient woodland sites. You are starting with a very simplified structure and, looking at it in purely economic terms, it is much easier to go in and fell that beautifully uniform product and put it to a sawmill and then restock. If you already have a large area of existing cover and it subject to natural disturbance, and you have different age classes coming through, it is so much easier to manage on a continuous cover basis.



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I would say that we do continuous cover forestry quite well on an awful lot of our managed broadleaf estate forests and woodlands around the country. We are beginning to see places like Stourhead and other estates moving towards continuous cover in conifer, but it takes time to develop that structural complexity. It also takes, perhaps, a slightly different skillset than exists, or has existed historically, in the forestry sector. We are beginning to see the move back towards silviculture, rather than forestry by numbers—plant in year X, take thinning every 10 years and then clear fell.

Q77 Barry Gardiner: That is really helpful; thank you. It is useful to have clarity that the different ages is what makes it more attractive to do that; there are not different ages here, but it makes more sense in areas where there are larger forests of different tree age. Dr Weatherall, you wanted to come in.

Dr Weatherall: Yes, really on the last point: there is a skills gap in forestry, across the sector for commercial forestry and for woodland ecology and management. People have grown up, or developed in their careers, with a system, but are now being asked to do something that is quite complex. It is quite difficult to transform from the even-aged forestry approach to a continuous cover forestry approach. When we get there, it will be easier to maintain it, but you need skilled workers who can deliver that kind of silviculture.

Q78 Sammy Wilson: You have explained why it is difficult to have the continuous cover approach to harvesting trees. The preference seems to be—perhaps just because of how our trees are distributed at present—for total clearance. In an earlier submission, we heard—you might have, too—that one of the ways in which the environmental damage is done is not so much just in the felling of the trees, but in how the trees were felled. Of course, most of the damage is done to the soil. Is the approach taken with large clearances not a recipe for ensuring that you do the most environmental damage to the soil as well? Because when you do total clearances, you tend to use heavy machinery, for example. I have seen them clearing forests in my own constituency, and it is amazing—but.

Dr Weatherall: It is fair to say that there is a concern across the sector about reducing the environmental impact of either clear felling or thinning. I have a gift for the Committee, which is a book written by a chartered forester—one of my colleagues, Luke Barley—who works for the National Trust. It came out last week, and it is called “Ancient: Reviving the Woods That Made Britain”. I will pass it over.

Chair: It is worth under £300, isn’t it?

Dr Weatherall: Yes, I am afraid so. Luke would prefer it to cost more, I think.

The book talks about many of the topics we are discussing. It talks about horse logging, for example, as having a lower impact on the soil system, when extracting timber from ancient woodland sites. You can use



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machinery that has lower impact on the compaction of the soil as well, so it is an active area right across the industry.

While it is true that clear felling will have more environmental damage, it is also not what we are looking for in ancient woodlands, because we want the gradual transformation of the canopy in terms of restoration. We are not looking for quick responses, unless it is to remove trees quickly because of pests or diseases. There are methods that can be used in both clear felling and thinning, and we are trying to use them.

Steve Knight: In a clear fell situation, you can use larger machines that have larger tyres, and there is more brash placed on the soil to protect it, so you can have minimal soil impact if it is managed correctly. If you are working by thinning all the time, so you are going in regularly, you are restricted to where you can go, and then you have a limited amount of buffering from the soil, so you can actually have quite a large impact on soil damage from continuously thinning.

One of the biggest challenges of ancient woodland management with soil protection is that, because of other constraints from species, the traditions you see and the protections on SSSIs, in broadleaf particularly, you tend to be forced to work it in the winter months, which tend to be the wetter months. Regardless of the type of machinery you use, you are going to cause more damage in those instances.

I have worked with horse logging on ancient woodlands before now in the Lake district, and they still damage soil. They have to do regular routes; if you are working large areas, you have to do lots of journeys up and down the same route, so they cause damage as well. There is no simple answer to that.

Yes, clear fell looks drastic, but, underneath the soil, the damage might be more minimal than doing continuous cover or other methods as well, in certain circumstances.

Q79 **Sammy Wilson:** You explained that, when you try to replace large trees with a mix of broadleaf, conifer and so on, the cost is much more expensive, and the returns will probably take longer to obtain. If we want to see the monoculture in many plantations at present replaced with much more mixed woodland, what are the economics of that kind of replacement? Secondly, how can people be incentivised to replace ancient woodlands with much more widespread tree species?

Steve Knight: I think that what stops people wanting to be more diverse in terms of the broadleaf species, and producing timber from broadleaf, so that you get the income generation from the broadleaves as we are used to, is the risk element—whether what you invest over time will be realised. The biggest impact on that, as we have mentioned, is deer and squirrels. At the moment, that is really holding back landowners who perhaps want to change back to broadleaf but retain some income from the revenue from their woodlands.



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Dr Weatherall: I am actually quite optimistic on this front. At the moment, it is true that a lot of the timber extracted from broadleaf woodland goes for low-grade things like wood fuel, but the developments in timber technology are really quite exciting. Glulam is an example where you do not need a long straight timber beam to do construction any more; you can produce composite materials. The future for broadleaf woodlands will be that there will be a market for timber, even though it is not straight and long. I am really optimistic about that.

- Q80 **Sammy Wilson:** I suppose the easiest thing is to do what you have always done. If you have always grown fir trees or whatever, you will always keep on doing that. How is your message disseminated to those who we have been told will be clearing woodlands over the next five years, to ensure that we do not start another cycle of these monoculture forests?

Dr Weatherall: I think it is fair to say that all the organisations represented at this session—Forestry Commission, Confor and the Woodland Trust, and certainly the Institute of Chartered Foresters—are engaged in disseminating information, continuing professional development seminars and courses. We are trying, but because of that skills gap, the universities are working hard on bringing through a new cohort. The arrangement between the Forestry Commission and the University of Cumbria for a very successful apprenticeship scheme is fast-tracking people into the industry with new skills. There will be change. It takes time and investment, of course, but those skills are coming through into the industry. With continuing professional development, the challenge is that a sector of the industry engages with that, and there are harder to reach elements, but everybody is really trying hard to create a workplace that is embracing a new kind of silvicultural challenge.

- Q81 **Sammy Wilson:** I do not share your optimism. I just look at my own constituency, where, even in Government-owned land, trees have been felled and already, four years on, the next batch of conifers are growing to my height almost. What needs to be done to break out of that cycle?

Dr Weatherall: It is important to remember that, beyond ancient woodland sites, we need timber production. We are worried about environmental offshoring. We need to think about the carbon benefits of trees as well. It is context. I advocate for what is called a triad forestry approach, in which some of our woodlands are primarily for nature's recovery, some are more intensive plantations for timber production and then there is a lot in the middle that is multi-objective forestry—mixed woodlands.

The ancient woodlands sit very much in that nature's recovery section; that does not mean to the exclusion of things that are focused more economically on producing profit and timber, but in a good environmental way. The 30by30 target would include the ancient woodlands, but we need that 70% to deliver for biodiversity, carbon and people, as well as producing timber.

- Q82 **Sammy Wilson:** Mr Tubby, maybe I picked up wrongly when you were



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answering Chris's questions. It seemed that you feared what would happen if development got too close to woodland sites. You outlined the difficulties of people using forest sites and the damage they could do with their animals, by walking or with fires and that kind of thing, but is not one of the ways of protecting our woodlands to make them more accessible to people? Then they would actually value them and be the first, when development threatens them, to oppose the destruction of the woodlands? Maybe I picked you up wrongly, but I think to wrap them in cotton wool from the public is the wrong thing to do.

Ian Tubby: We absolutely want more people in woodlands, but we want them to be using those woodlands responsibly. That is keeping dogs on the lead and not fly-tipping—all those things. However, getting more people in the woodlands is very important. As part of that, we need to try and help increase society's understanding of sustainable forest management and what it takes to manage a forest well and keep ecosystems thriving and biodiversity healthy. I am not saying keep people out of woodlands; that is not what I want to do at all. However, we must ensure that people have access and infrastructure to enable them to use those woodlands responsibly. Things such as starting fires accidentally from campfires and barbecues—all that stuff needs such a lot more awareness raising so that people really understand what their potential impact can be on a woodland if they are not acting responsibly within it.

What I would really like to see in terms of woodland management and creation and development is turning some of the new towns that are being proposed into forest towns. That is certainly something that my organisation and Natural England are quite keen on. If we establish a new town, then surround it by 1,000 hectares of new woodland, join up some of these ancient woodland fragments, build with timber and connect the new residents of that town with the environment that is around them and supporting them. There is a huge amount we can do with public engagement and increasing awareness of how to use woodland responsibly.

Q83 Jonathan Davies: Thank you for joining us today. I have some questions about Government support for ancient woodland, but before I get to them, do you have any reflections on why it would seem that we still do not have a handle on how much ancient woodland there is and where it is?

I note that in the environmental improvement plan there is an aspiration to have the inventory updated by 2027. However, we have had a definition of ancient woodland since Natural England's predecessor organisation developed it in the 1980s, and we are relying on maps which go back to the 1600s. I know that some of those will be hard to read and follow, but it would seem we do not have a proper handle on where these woodlands are and their extent.

Dr Weatherall: It is a good question. I think the answer is partly that our understanding of ancient woodlands is changing. For example, we are now incorporating ancient wood pasture as a habitat type. We do not just rely on the maps; there are ecological indicators as well. You may find that a



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woodland under threat is not classified or mapped as an ancient woodland, but if you do a survey, it has plants or trees such as small-leaved lime that suggest that it is an ancient woodland.

It is not as simple as looking at a map. It is quite an undertaking. Although there are only about 360,000 hectares of ancient woodland in England, that is still a lot of ground to cover. Plus, there are the woodlands that we have not included in the first inventory to go and investigate if we now think that they are ancient. Resources can be a challenge, but my understanding is that Natural England, which has been leading on the inventory, is now very close to publishing it and it will be better and more comprehensive than before.

- Q84 **Jonathan Davies:** I understand that the responsibility for the inventory sits with MHCLG and DEFRA. This is quite a complicated space when you think about the interaction between woodland and public bodies or Government. Obviously, we have DEFRA, as you would perhaps expect, but then there is the MHCLG, local authorities, the Forestry Commission, Natural England, and I could go on. It is quite a confused space. Is there a lack of clarity because of there being so many people trying to manage it? Would it be better if just one organisation took more control?

Dr Weatherall: I am quite astonished by how many organisations and Government Departments you mentioned. You clearly know more about this than I do.

Jonathan Davies: I very much don't know more about it than you.

Dr Weatherall: My understanding was that Natural England was leading on it and that it is quite close to fruition. I do not know if my colleagues know more than me about that.

Ian Tubby: We are certainly working closely with Natural England on that, because it is in our interest to have a comprehensive understanding of where the ancient woodland is and what condition it is in.

- Q85 **Jonathan Davies:** Can the public help with the inventory, if they are enthusiasts?

Ian Tubby: I don't know if this is something that a citizen science-type approach could help with, or if it is more reliant on looking at the indicators of species that are present in an existing woodland. I honestly don't know.

Dr Weatherall: I love the idea of it, though.

- Q86 **Jonathan Davies:** I certainly think there are people in my local area who would love to engage with an activity like that.

What Government initiatives are there to restore ancient woodland, and how are they being delivered? I know that the Government—correct me if I am wrong—have an aspiration to create and restore 500 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat by 2050. I would be grateful if you could tell me if that is correct and give me an assessment of how well we are doing, given that

that is 24 years away.

Dr Weatherall: I think it is 500,000 hectares.

Jonathan Davies: Oh yes, I have written 500k.

Ian Tubby: Yes, it is 500,000. Native woodland that is planted outside designated sites will contribute to that target. In England we want to achieve, in the long term, somewhere around 10,000 hectares of woodland creation a year.

Q87 **Jonathan Davies:** And that will get us there, will it? Pardon my maths.

Ian Tubby: That will do the woodland contribution towards that target. On top of that, there will also be the creation or restoration of other habitats—peat bog, heathland and that type of thing. I haven't got the stats for tree planting this year in front of me, so I will confirm this with the Committee afterwards, but, at the moment, we are at about 7,000 hectares a year.

Jonathan Davies: So we are not getting to that 10,000.

Ian Tubby: We are still short of it, but the rate at which woodland creation has picked up in the last few years has been quite encouraging. Certainly, at the moment, I think about 90% of the woodland being planted is native broadleaf species. We are doing reasonably well on nature recovery, and perhaps less well on creating woodlands for timber and carbon production and hitting net zero in the long term.

Q88 **Jonathan Davies:** There is a number of recommendations, or pieces of guidance in respect of ancient woodlands, in the environmental improvement plan. Would you share my assessment that they feel a bit woolly? It just talks about improving the condition of ancient and semi-natural woodlands and delivering on our commitment to enhance the biodiversity of all unrestored plantations on ancient woodland. Are there any meaningful measures to assess how the Government are helping to make that happen?

Ian Tubby: From a forestry perspective, I am fairly pleased with where we have got to with the environmental improvement plan. I think it sets us decent strategic objectives to try and reach over the next few decades. One of the commitments in the EIP is to produce a tree action plan. That will provide us with an opportunity to actually set out how we will deliver some of the ambitions and wider, maybe slightly woollier commitments in the EIP. But it sets a really good backdrop for the trees action plan to build on.

Q89 **Jonathan Davies:** To summarise, it is a good foundation, but it needs some more clarity about how it will be delivered.

Ian Tubby: Yes.

Jonathan Davies: How will that come through? Will it be DEFRA that needs to bring that through?

Ian Tubby: DEFRA is leading the development of the trees action plan at the moment. It is a live piece of work.

Jonathan Davies: Well, I shall inquire as to how it is getting on.

Dr Weatherall: I want to support that. There are, inevitably, some statements in the environmental improvement plan that are certainly not smart targets—let's put it like that—but we are hopeful that the tree action plan will come through with more of the detail. DEFRA is trying to consult with a wide range of stakeholders on that, so we look forward to seeing the results of that process.

Q90 **Jonathan Davies:** Time is short, but I wonder if I might bring you in, Mr Knight. Are you familiar with the environmental improvement plan?

Steve Knight: I am afraid I am not.

Q91 **Jonathan Davies:** Okay. I just wondered if you had any thoughts about whether there was a tension between the EIP's aims of protecting ancient woodland and some of your stakeholders who, no doubt, will want to increase timber production.

Steve Knight: By the very nature of that, there will be, and how that is approached over time is the bit that needs focusing on. All the things we have been talking about today will have to be taken into account in order to move things forward to a place where the Government may wish the country to be.

Dr Weatherall: We need to do both. The Forestry Commission's sensitivity mapping shows that, in low-risk sensitivity areas, there is about 10 times as much land available as the tree cover expansion target to 2050. It is about siting new productive woodlands in the right places that do not impact on things. Restoration of ancient woodlands should not be seen as a loss of productive timber, because the new planting should be going forward and doing that. It is not either/or but both.

Steve Knight: Woodland creation is a challenge, and it is becoming more of a challenge to get things through, in terms of productivity for forests—

Q92 **Chair:** To get it through where?

Steve Knight: To get it through regulators and to get plans through, because of the timescale but also because things get pushed through regulators and then they are challenged in the courts. A project for several hundred hectares-worth of mixed woodland that is given a tick might be stopped by the courts. It is nice to say, "We're going to boost it," one way or the other, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to deliver.

Q93 **Chair:** That seems like an irony, because it feels like we spend a lot of time on this Committee talking about planning restrictions and whether they get in the way of building homes, but you are saying that our planning restrictions are getting in the way of planting trees as well.

Steve Knight: The perception of the woodland, land use change and EI regulations all come into it.



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Q94 **Barry Gardiner:** First of all, Dr Weatherall, thank you so much for bringing these books—

Dr Weatherall: It is just one.

Barry Gardiner: Oh, just one? Well, we will share it around and fight over who gets it first.

Chair: We will have a raffle.

Barry Gardiner: Mr Tubby, you said you were not familiar with the UK's temperate rainforests, so I will recommend a book to you: Guy Shrubsole's "The Lost Rainforests of Britain" is well worth a read.

Ian Tubby: Thank you.

Chair: You have not brought him one, though.

Q95 **Barry Gardiner:** If only I had known. We are talking about ancient woodland, going back to 1600. Landowners do not live for 400-odd years; they die, and sometimes they sell their land. I want you to give us some ideas on the woodland carbon code and the credits—the offsets—that are made under the code. You have the pending issuance units and the woodland carbon units, but because these are personal contracts with the landowner, if the landowner dies or sells their land, they are gone. How do we overcome that? I know that these are not contributing to our national emissions; it is a private offsetting scheme, but it is one that is, and can be, very valuable for those wanting to plant and indeed restore ancient woodlands. What recommendations should this Committee be making to ensure continuity of that contract?

Ian Tubby: The woodland carbon code applies only to new woodlands that are being planted, so it is not a code that can be retrofitted on to an existing woodland.

Q96 **Barry Gardiner:** But it is used for restoration projects of ancient woodland.

Dr Weatherall: Not that we are aware of.

Q97 **Barry Gardiner:** Actually, it has been done at Ceannacroc, an estate in Scotland. It may be a slightly different regime, but—

Ian Tubby: I am aware of the project that you refer to. Forestry is a devolved policy area, so Scottish Forestry are probably best placed to answer on any details about the specific case. I think that was perhaps about establishing woodland where it once was, rather than restoring standing trees. The woodland carbon code applies only where you are planting a new woodland. If the woodland was there 300 years ago, but was cleared and you are planting new trees, the woodland carbon code applies to that.

Q98 **Barry Gardiner:** You could use that, then. Let's say an ancient woodland had been damaged and a third of it lost, in the way that you suggest. If you were planting new broadleaf species there to extend that woodland,

would that not count under the carbon code?

Ian Tubby: Only the trees that you are planting.

Q99 **Barry Gardiner:** Yes, of course. That is part of a restoration project, isn't it?

Dr Weatherall: I don't think it would. I think it is about tree cover expansion. On the use of the word "restore", I don't want to be rude about a project I don't know much about, but it is a little bit of a marketing thing in that instance. It is a ghost woodland. It has ceased to exist—I sound a little bit like Monty Python now. I don't think you would use it under the existing canopy, because the metrics in the woodland carbon code to calculate the carbon are not predicated on there being existing woodland cover there.

Q100 **Barry Gardiner:** Right, so this is not going to help. As it stands, it would not be of use to help ancient woodland.

Dr Weatherall: No.

Q101 **Barry Gardiner:** In terms of the scheme itself—putting ancient woodland to one side—what recommendations should the Committee make to ensure that these projects do not die with the landowner, as it were, or when the land is sold on?

Ian Tubby: Within the woodland carbon code, there have been several examples of where land has changed hands once the woodland has been established and the trees have been planted, so having legal agreements that protect the financial arrangements around the sale of the carbon is very important. We have taken legal advice as the code has been developed, and the woodland carbon code applies to England, Wales and Scotland, so the devolved Administrations continue to work together on that. The code also includes a buffer, because what we do not want to happen is the code being viewed as a bit of greenwash and the carbon not really being there. So the code is quite conservative when it comes to estimating the likely growth rate of the new woodland and hence the carbon that it contains.

Q102 **Barry Gardiner:** You have those thresholds, as it were, for the PIUs and WCUs.

Ian Tubby: Yes.

Barry Gardiner: At five and 15 years.

Ian Tubby: That's right. It is not just a desk exercise; I believe on-site mensuration takes place to really give an accurate picture of the wood that is there.

Q103 **Barry Gardiner:** I understand the security within the scheme. I am more concerned about when the land is sold. Because it is a personal contract, there is no obligation on the new landowner to continue and deliver that, and there is no security of sequestration of the carbon in perpetuity.



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Dr Weatherall: I feel that we are trying to answer on something that we possibly do not have the expertise to get exactly right for you. Although it is across the three countries, it is led out of Scottish Forestry, and Pat Snowden in Scottish Forestry is the best person to talk to. I am sure he would be willing to submit a written response to you to clarify it.

Q104 **Barry Gardiner:** That is very helpful—thank you. Finally, Mr Tubby, the Forestry Commission has three principles that you operate to: management, production and conservation. Do you believe that the Forestry Commission has got those in the right balance?

Ian Tubby: Looking back over the last quarter of a century, I think perhaps we haven't. With woodland creation, we have planted about 77,000 hectares of broadleaf woodland and only about 4,000 hectares of conifer woodland. We have also lost about 40,000 hectares of conifer woodland, for good reasons, where we are restoring habitat and bringing monocultural plantations up to UKFS—UK forestry standard—specification. As I say, I feel we are making reasonably good progress towards the nature recovery targets when it comes to planting native broadleaves.

The difficulty at the moment is that we have not found the right combination of incentives to unlock more land for some of the more productive, faster-growing species that we need for timber security and to help hit net zero. That is a policy gap that we need to try to grasp.

There is another thing I would like to see, and it is coming. I feel that over the last few years the focus has been very much on woodland creation. We must not forget the 1.3 million hectares of woodlands out there already storing all of that carbon and providing all of that habitat. We really need to carry on doing what we are doing with woodland creation when it comes to broadleaves, turn the dial up a little bit on conifer, and certainly turn the dial up on managing that existing resource.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed for that, Mr Knight, Mr Tubby and Dr Weatherall. That brings this session to a close.