



# Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

## Oral evidence: Tree Planting and Woodlands, HC 356

Tuesday 15 June 2021

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Ian Byrne; Dave Doogan; Rosie Duffield; Dr Neil Hudson; Mrs Sheryll Murray; Julian Sturdy; Derek Thomas.

Questions 64 to 128

### Witnesses

I: Caroline Ayre, England National Manager, Confor; Brian Fraser, Board Member and Member of Tree & Hedging Group, Horticultural Trades Association; Hamish Macleod, Public Affairs Advisor, BSW Timber Group.

II: Shireen Chambers, Executive & Technical Director, Institute of Chartered Foresters; David Sutherland, Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport; Jen Turner, Development Manager, Royal Forestry Society.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Confor](#)
- [Horticultural Trades Association](#)
- [BSW Timber Group](#)
- [Institute of Chartered Foresters](#)
- [Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport](#)
- [Royal Forestry Society](#)



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Caroline Ayre, Brian Fraser and Hamish Macleod.

Q64 **Chair:** Welcome to the EFRA Select Committee. We are looking at forestry and tree planting. This afternoon, we have Caroline Ayre, Brian Fraser and Hamish Macleod with us for the first panel. Can you introduce yourselves please for the record?

**Caroline Ayre:** Hello, I am Caroline Ayre. I am a chartered forester and I am the England national manager for the Confederation of Forest Industries. We are the seed to saw membership organisation.

**Brian Fraser:** Hi, I am Brian Fraser. I sit on the board of the HTA as a non-executive director. I am also a past chair of the HTA tree and hedging group and a director of Oakover Nurseries.

**Hamish Macleod:** Good afternoon, everyone. I am Hamish Macleod. I am with BSW Timber Group, which is a company involved with timber, forestry management and nurseries. I work on public affairs with BSW, having formerly run one of its sawmills in south-west Scotland. I have had six years as a non-exec forestry commissioner, year ending 2016.

Q65 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I will start asking the first question. As a Select Committee, we are naturally looking into the Government projects. This is almost a think-tank operation, so we are also looking for ideas as we go through. Please, if you have ideas, do not hesitate—even if they are your own ideas, please add them into the mix. Are the right measures and financial incentives in place to reach the UK target of 30,000 hectares of new woodland a year? That is a very big question.

**Hamish Macleod:** Financial incentives are only one aspect of attracting forestry investment and woodland creation. The four countries of the UK have approached this in very different ways and achieved slightly different results, in terms of achieving targets and so on. The financial incentives, as I said, are only one aspect. There is an appetite to invest in forestry. The financial incentives perhaps add nuance to potential investors in how they may actually approach the planting scheme, how they might select the types of forest they want to create and whether their investment is short or long term. Caroline could probably comment more deeply in terms of actual responses of people to financial incentives.

Q66 **Chair:** It is about whether we are getting the incentives right. That is the thing. Are they going to encourage this amount? You know, 30,000 hectares is quite a lot.

**Caroline Ayre:** I can only comment on England, because that is my patch. We have the recently launched England woodland creation offer. The money looks good. The stacking of the various supplements for what you would call natural capital is being trialled. You can throw all the



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money in the world at new planting—or shall we call it new woodland establishment? There has to be the appetite of the landowner to do that.

As we all know, there is competition for land. Farmers are very entrenched historically within the farming enterprise. Woodland is a new science to a lot of them. There are intergenerational issues, with older farmers wanting to farm as they always have. Forestry, although it can deliver so much for a landholding, in terms of resilience, is a new science. They need that advice and economic baseline that they are used to as an annual return in farming to continue.

On ELMS, we will wait and see. It is the sustainable farming incentive. I think we have had 2,000 applications. We do not know yet how that is broken down. The farm woodland standard has been taken up. We are not sure yet.

Q67 **Chair:** Before I leave you, Caroline, putting my farming hat on, one of the problems farmers will have with tree planting is that, once you go into tree planting, you have largely sold your soul for a Government subsidy. That is the trouble, you see. That is probably for 30 or 40 years. You have to have confidence that successive Governments are going to fund it and that it is enough to do. To start with, I think you will find we will hit the 30,000 hectares quite easily, but after that it will get harder. Is that your view of life?

**Caroline Ayre:** As a sixth-generation Cumbrian hill sheep farmer, now living in Devon, I absolutely understand the issues. Will we meet the 30,000 hectares? If I can concentrate on England, at 10,000 hectares, considering we have only done 2,300 hectares last year, and the planting stats are due out this Thursday, I think we will struggle. Organisations are finding it difficult to find land to plant because of various competing regulatory requirements. I think we will struggle, but we have to be positive.

Q68 **Chair:** Okay, that is a fair answer. What we want from you today is exactly what you think, so do not worry about having to be positive. Just say what you think in this Committee. Most people do.

**Brian Fraser:** It is slightly difficult from a nurseryman's point of view to talk about incentives for potential customers to plant trees. Without that confidence in the marketplace, those trees will not be grown to meet any additional targets. We need the commitment. We need that confidence from those customers that they are going to take our trees to plant.

Q69 **Chair:** On that issue, what are the numbers of trees as a whole we are growing in nurseries now? Have you any idea?

**Brian Fraser:** As a rough estimate, we are looking at maybe in the region of 100 million to 120 million plants in total. To hit those targets, we are looking at far in excess of that. That is not to say that the market or the nurserymen can actually achieve that. We can, but it is having the confidence. I will keep referring to confidence in the marketplace.



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Q70 **Chair:** Yes, because you have to make investment in order to grow those trees. You have to be certain. With a hectare of trees, I suppose it depends on the variety. What sorts of numbers are we talking about per hectare?

**Brian Fraser:** That is down to the grant situation and what is required. If you work on a ballpark figure between 1,600 and 1,800 plants per hectare, that is probably about where they are.

Q71 **Chair:** You are talking a lot of trees.

**Brian Fraser:** Bear in mind that the figures quoted are not just for woodland creation. There are obviously restocking levels included in there as well and planting that goes on without woodland grant.

Q72 **Chair:** I remember back in the days of Owen Paterson when we first discovered ash dieback. The argument was then that we need to grow a lot more trees. We could be much more biosecure from diseases if we did. You are going to need greater incentives and confidence if you can fulfil that role. Is that what you are saying?

**Brian Fraser:** Yes, that is a fair point. That confidence in the market is what will drive us forward, most definitely.

Q73 **Chair:** We could actually have a very secure supply of trees in this country, but we have to get it right. Caroline, this is the last part of the question. Has Defra engaged your members about the design of ELMS? You talked a little bit about it in your initial answer to me, so we are asking you a loaded question there. Has Defra liaised properly with you?

**Caroline Ayre:** Yes. I will be kind to Defra. Confor and the ICF are the two forestry representatives on the ELMS stakeholder engagement group, on the co-design groups. It has been a long, convoluted process; I will say that. Trying to develop ELMS has taken up an inordinate amount of time. Of course it is productivity-led, farming-led, food-led. Our little voices have had to shout quite loudly to get forestry and fibre within those conversations and the farm woodland standard. It is what it is.

I have had a lot of experience in working with Defra on this. We have been questioned and interviewed countless times, once by the Environmental Audit Committee on whether forestry has had a fair shout and a fair voice within the process. It has, but we are up against very loud voices from other land uses.

Q74 **Chair:** It is good that they are talking to you, but are they listening to you? It is quite a different thing. ELMS is in danger of getting so complicated that it may be more complicated than what it replaced before from the CAP if they are not careful. What is your judgment on that?

**Caroline Ayre:** I absolutely agree with what you just said, yes. Are they listening? The proof will be in the pudding. I am afraid I said, "Who knows?" The first component is out and it is what it is. We do not know



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what the next two components will look like, because it is an ever-changing feast, as such.

**Q75 Chair:** I will not press you harder on that. All of us ourselves do not quite know what is coming out of the sausage machine. I know even the Secretary of State and others are quite concerned sometimes that we do not get too complicated. We are trying to include absolutely everything in it, which is very laudable. We have to be careful in the end that we do not make it ridiculously complex. Then people will not take up the schemes. That is the trouble.

**Caroline Ayre:** That is a problem. It is looking horribly complex again, with minimal communication to landowners. It was very heartening to see that ELMS was recognised within the England trees action plan as long term, going forward. The England woodland creation offer is dipping its toe into natural capital payments, so hopefully that will segue nicely into ELMS. It is “suck it and see”, even with the England woodland creation offer.

**Chair:** That leads me quite neatly into the second question.

**Q76 Mrs Murray:** This is to Caroline and Hamish. Why do you consider that the approval processes for forestry create unnecessary barriers for your industry?

**Caroline Ayre:** It is timescales and cost. It is simple. On timescales, sometimes we are looking at even a woodland management plan, which is probably the lowest of the regulatory processes, that takes two years to be approved.

You could have a farmer who is used to annual returns and being able to plant pretty much what they like, looking at putting trees in, which will be a permanent land use change. They are then told that they have to put up X amount—tens of thousands of pounds sometimes, depending on the scheme. After they have spent that money on the various environmental impact assessments and surveys that go with that, they might not be able to get trees in the ground. That is a problem and it can take years. One of my members said that it is easier to build a house than put a tree in the ground.

**Hamish Macleod:** Certainly the time it takes and the cost are quite incredible sometimes. Within Tilhill, we have some applications that can take two to three years. Sometimes consultations run consecutively, rather than concurrently or in parallel. At times, even schemes that have failed to materialise have cost us £50,000 or £60,000. That is not atypical in terms of the process we have gone through.

**Q77 Chair:** Do you feel that this time delay is teething problems, or is it just inherent in the system?

**Caroline Ayre:** It is a double-edged sword. We are, as an industry, fairly highly regulated and we go through really transparent stakeholder and



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public engagement processes when we go through a planting scheme. That of course brings with it entrenched views sometimes from stakeholders and sometimes within their own staff. We have to be very careful that there are preconceptions and outdated views. We are tarred with a brush of wanting to be open, and rightly so. That often brings with it criticism.

**Brian Fraser:** These delays help to undermine the growing of the trees. Trees have a shelf life. We are aiming to produce those plants in a certain year. If schemes are delayed, those trees may not be available again for the following season because they have become too big. It undermines our position.

**Chair:** It blocks confidence.

**Hamish Macleod:** Closing dates would be helpful. If we had closing dates at certain points of the process, the applicants would have a clear idea that at least they will get a decision by such and such a date. It would provide a little bit more certainty.

**Chair:** Yes. If you were entering into any sort of private contract, you would like to have some sort of end date. It would be interesting to see if we could achieve that in Government, so we have a question to ask the Minister.

Q78 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you to our witnesses for being before us today. My question is continuing on the forestry approval process. You have talked about some of the issues with regulation as well. Throwing it on its head, if there is any streamlining that comes down the track with regulation, how can we ensure that streamlining does not then lead to weaker environmental controls, throwing it back the other way? Caroline, do want to kick off?

**Caroline Ayre:** Can I pass that over to Hamish? I know that that was the very question that came back from the Mackinnon reports in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Is simplifying going to mean a drop in standards? I believe it absolutely will not. All it has done is to make a robust system more effectively. Perhaps Hamish has experience.

**Hamish Macleod:** The so-called Mackinnon reports and the results of that afterwards certainly highlighted what I mentioned in the previous question. That is a clear timetable, so that expectations are set out very early, in terms of an application process. People are still given plenty of opportunity and time to respond and to put submissions in, in terms of any objections, observations and so on, but at least it is to a timetable that is achievable, is much more manageable and keeps the interest of the potential investor and the landowner on board. Where you have things dragging out, there is a great danger that people lose interest in pursuing that scheme.

Q79 **Dr Hudson:** So you need a manageable timetable. Are you confident that the streamlining will not lead to weaker environmental controls?



**Hamish Macleod:** Yes, I am very confident. We have seen that again with some of the schemes that we have managed in Scotland. Consultation is probably even greater now than it was before, because there is greater visibility that a scheme has been applied for and greater publicity.

**Caroline Ayre:** I wanted to mention the UK forestry standard, which everybody on this Committee should be aware of. We operate under the UK forestry standard and that offers assurances that planting and management are done under the best regulatory processes. It is not just about timber; it is about biodiversity, climate change, historic environment, landscape, people, soils and water. All those guidelines have been developed with stakeholders over 30 years now, so we operate to a very high standard.

Q80 **Rosie Duffield:** This is mostly aimed at Caroline and Hamish. Is the lack of a skilled forestry workforce a major barrier to achieving the UK's tree planting targets? If so, how can it be addressed? As a Committee, we have been looking at the closure of agricultural colleges and some of the problems; Wye in Kent is no longer available, for example. I wonder if that possibly plays into the problem as well.

**Caroline Ayre:** We are on the cusp of having some proper evidence as well, because we are undertaking a survey that builds on what was called the skills action plan. This is for England and Wales. Lantra, Confor and a consultancy are bringing together the data that will underpin whether these planting targets can be met by the labour we have and the amount of labour we need. I believe the HTA is undertaking that same sort of study as well.

**Brian Fraser:** Certainly from a grower's point of view, labour is an issue, and it is not just skilled labour; it is labour in general. At this very moment, we are not able to utilise the seasonal workers scheme, because we are not part of the edible sector. Even if we were, the pilot scheme is not large enough to cope with the requirements of the horticultural sector. From our point of view, skills and workers in general are an issue. It certainly hinders the increasing growing of trees to meet these targets.

Q81 **Rosie Duffield:** That was going to be the second part of my question, about seasonal workers.

**Hamish Macleod:** Seasonal workers is a particularly critical issue for us, because within our planting programmes we have employed up to 60 or so seasonal workers in any one season. That of course is being phased out and gradually comes to an end this year. There is the scheme for edible horticultural seasonal workers in place, but there is no equivalent scheme for us.

That has set us the challenge of how we actually replace those people, if you like. We have been investing in a number of opportunities. For example, we support a college in Wales in terms of developing forestry



skills, which we see as vital if we are going to meet any of our targets here. It is a long-term programme. We see that the only way of us actually being able to overcome this is to invest in young people right from the very beginning and attract people into the countryside to work with us in forestry and forestry management, including planting.

There is a gap; there is no doubt. There is a train coming down the line. If all of a sudden we had land available to plant 7,000 to 10,000 hectares of England, we would struggle right now, because of that gap in the scheme.

**Q82 Rosie Duffield:** I am really worried about this because I have Blean forest in my constituency, which is one of the largest, most ancient woodlands in England. Are you all being asked by Defra for suggestions about what to do about this? Do you think you are getting the help you need to try to attract those new kinds of seasonal workers or young people into this business?

**Caroline Ayre:** Yes, Defra is very engaged with us. I am sure Shireen and Jen will comment with far more experience later on. Defra is doing workstreams on sector capacity with the Forestry Commission, on nursery capacity and on workforce and skills, like this study. That builds also on work that was done in Scotland. It recognises that there could be an issue, absolutely.

It was such a shame that we were unsuccessful with our plea to the Migration Advisory Committee about seasonal labour. We hope these figures that are coming within this consultation will be the evidence that we need to make that case.

**Q83 Dave Doogan:** We have heard a very important point from Caroline, Brian and Hamish that I would like to distil, because I think it is important to the Committee and our future work to understand this clearly. Forestry workers are not part of the seasonal agricultural workers scheme. I think I picked up rightly that an appeal was made by the industry, or advances were made by the industry to have forestry workers included in the scheme, but this was declined.

This is to understand two things with a little more clarity. I will challenge you to put a percentage on it. Say you had free access to labour from anywhere in Europe to operationally carry out this work. You do not, so what is the percentage size of that capacity or labour gap? Secondly, a contributing factor is the age of your workforce, I would assume, because forestry is a long-term enterprise. How big an issue is the average age of your workforce to compound this lack of labour from outwith?

**Chair:** Can I add a bit to Dave's point? Are the agricultural colleges and others actually training our homegrown workforce to plant trees and do forestry?

**Caroline Ayre:** I cannot answer the percentages on the migration with any robust evidence. There are anecdotal figures of, gosh, something like





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18,000 workers needed. That is absolutely outdated and I do not really want to put that on record without looking at clearer evidence.

Q84 **Chair:** I would suggest you give us something in writing on that one, rather than put anything on record on that.

**Caroline Ayre:** Yes, absolutely. As far as the ageing workforce is concerned, within what we would call motor-manual, the harvesting side of things, we certainly have an ageing workforce. Often these businesses are single-man, father and son or father and daughter businesses—small businesses that do not necessarily have the succession planning behind them. That is one issue.

Another is the upskilling of that sector. There are new techniques, new machinery and what is called forest machinery operator training. There are all these things that are, I suppose, CPD, if you want to call it that. You bring them up to a certain level in a modern industry. That is an issue and it has been recognised for a very long time within the contracting sector.

I will revert to others on colleges. Newton Rigg has just closed. I went to Newton Rigg; many went to Newton Rigg. We do not have those colleges bringing up the rear guard for people. Certainly Jan and Shireen will be able to comment later on that with real experience.

**Chair:** We took evidence about Newton Rigg and did a very short inquiry on it, so it is interesting you should make that point.

**Brian Fraser:** From a nursery situation, I would suggest that almost every nursery is using seasonal labour in one form or another. I cannot put a figure on it, but we will try to get some evidence to you for the record. It is certainly the case that we are using seasonal labour.

With regard to an ageing workforce, I can attest to that. For our own business that is the case and I think it is the same throughout the sector. Trying to attract younger members into our workforce is very difficult. That may be down to the perception of the sector, which is probably more of an issue for the sector than anything else. To try to overcome this, we are looking at using new technologies that are coming down the line, with regard to grading of trees et cetera.

However, technology is not cheap. Technology and investment always come out of profit. You need a profitable, strong business to invest in new technology. For that to happen, we need confidence to be able to expand our business. There are and have been grants offered to the sector, but it would be helpful to have those at a higher level, certainly in the amount that can be attributed to it.

**Hamish Macleod:** Irrespective of the efforts that we as business can make in terms of creating apprenticeship schemes and putting cash into this, there are a number of factors affecting us as well. We are talking about very much a rural sector and it is attracting people to come and



live and work in the countryside, which, for many young people, is difficult. We have diversity issues too, in that not very many women are attracted to work at the sharp end, in terms of some of the forestry jobs that we do. There are some women working in the industry, but not necessarily at some of the jobs that we are looking at here.

We have these challenges. Overlying that, up and down the supply chain, we have a shortage of lorry drivers, which is having a major effect on us in terms of logistics. Part of that is demographic; part of it is, dare I say, a Brexit effect. We are losing people working in the transport sector as well. Right across the industry, we are having difficulty in attracting and retaining. I underline the fact that businesses like ours are putting a lot of effort and support into creating apprenticeship schemes, but actually attracting people into them in the first place is a big challenge for us.

**Chair:** There were some good answers there, thank you.

**Q85** **Derek Thomas:** Having set about planting 20,000 trees over the last 18 months with the Woodland Trust, I have a question regarding the actual supply of trees and how the Government have supported UK nurseries. To Brian and possibly Hamish, have the Government put the right support in place to enable UK nurseries to meet demand for the new tree planting targets? Is the supply there to meet the demand?

**Brian Fraser:** Given a long enough timeline, I am sure the industry can step up to meet the demand that is required. However, given the timeframes that we are talking about, 2024 or the life of this Parliament, to hit the targets that have been talked about, I would suggest that is not achievable, to come up with those numbers of plants.

That is very simple because growing a tree to put in the ground takes between one and four years. We are now in 2021. If we start sowing next year, it is only two years we have to produce those plants. That is the crux of this; that is the reality. On occasions, that has been forgotten. That engagement with the sector needs to be at time of inception, not when the schemes have been decided.

**Q86** **Derek Thomas:** Hamish, picking up on that, are there other ways of doing this? In Cornwall, we are doing the Forest for Cornwall. One of the ideas is that we get every child to plant an acorn or something similar. That is never going to be the kind of scale that we are talking about, but what is the thinking in Government where they almost commit to a target and do not check that it is deliverable? The problem is, as all of us would know, that that just saps confidence in future commitments.

**Hamish Macleod:** I agree. We have to bear in mind that the targets we are talking about have been talked about for about six or seven years. They were aspirations; then they were ambitions. Now they have become targets, but it has taken that length of time for Government to focus on what they really want to achieve.



In the meantime, nurseries got really excited a few years ago and started developing their seed stock. I know that in Melton, for example—I think it was four years ago—we ended up having to destroy trees because we could not actually use them. We are at the point now where it is all pressure on us. The nursery sector has taken a bit of a beating over the last few years in preparing for these targets, so we are coming out of this battered and bruised a little bit. We are now prepared to make investments, “but let us see the colour of your money”, as it were. That is the position we have got to now.

**Q87 Derek Thomas:** Brian, do the post-Brexit border controls present a problem? How is that affecting imports of seeds and planting stock?

**Brian Fraser:** It has an effect. There is a requirement for imported seeds, as we are all aware, with climate change et cetera, looking at provenances further south. However, the majority of seed is still available to us. It is a case of what species are required.

Again, this comes back to the planning and the involvement from the sector. Clearly, if someone comes in wanting 100,000 of a certain species and that seed has not been collected, it is not going to be available. If the timeframe is extended and the nurseries and seed suppliers are involved, there is a far better chance of the plants being made available when they are required.

**Q88 Derek Thomas:** I do not know if anyone else wants to comment on that. Are you saying that the Government cannot possibly reach the target, or is there some way round it?

**Caroline Ayre:** Is the question whether we will meet the target?

**Q89 Derek Thomas:** Given what Hamish and Brian have said, is the target dead in the water before we even get going?

**Caroline Ayre:** There has to be a conviction around how we are going to deliver it, yes. As Brian says, the trees are there, but we have to be very sure that the species we want to plant are there. It is all very well planting X thousand hectares of some random species that the nursery does not have. For resilience purposes it is absolutely fine but, if it is not there, it is not there.

We need to talk about establishment, not just planting. We can put a tree in the ground, but it needs to have longevity to be able to deliver all the benefits it delivers. I know Laura down in Cornwall is very much behind that. The Forest for Cornwall is a great initiative.

**Chair:** Ian, if you want to broaden the question a bit, you are most welcome.

**Q90 Ian Byrne:** It is a fascinating evidence session once more. I will aim this at Brian to begin with. Defra is looking to increase its plant health inspection capacity to mitigate biosecurity risks from imports. It wants



more planting material to be sown and grown in the UK.

Can I ask about the proposed closure of the publicly owned Wykeham nursery in North Yorkshire, where the plants and seeds are supplied, from April 2022? With the loss of 6.5 million trees produced in the UK, how will that impact on biosecurity risks, planting targets and, in the light of the evidence we have just heard, expertise and skills?

**Brian Fraser:** In reality, any loss of any nursery is not good for the sector. It is a loss of skills; it is a loss of plant supply. There is no doubt about that. The question needs to be aimed more towards Defra and Forestry England for reasoning why they closed their nurseries.

From a private sector point of view, again it adds to pressure for us to supply. It does not mean to say that we cannot supply, but it is about having the confidence to meet those targets and to increase the production to cover those additional trees. May I please suggest you ask your question to Forestry England for its reasons why it closed its own nursery?

**Ian Byrne:** I certainly will. I was interested in your take on it. Does anyone else want to make a contribution on that question?

**Chair:** On that one, I feel a letter from the Committee coming on, directly to both Defra and Forestry England. Do you?

**Ian Byrne:** I certainly do.

**Chair:** That was a good question, Ian.

Q91 **Julian Sturdy:** Given what we have heard already from the evidence taken, I wonder what the panel thinks. Is there enough certainty in the schemes going forward for nurseries to start to potentially increase numbers of trees, given that it is going to take four years to get them to the marketplace?

**Brian Fraser:** I keep talking about confidence in the market. Taking the planting levels for the UK as a whole, if you have seen what has happened in Scotland, we had targets of 10,000 hectares. It was beaten and in Scotland we planted 12,000. We have seen how the supply of trees has increased to allow that to happen. The reason for that confidence primarily has been down to the level of commitment from that Scottish Government and from, in particular, the Minister in charge under Fergus Ewing.

We had hoped that that would continue for Scotland, but to increase its targets from 12,000 hectares to 18,000 hectares is one big leap. I suggest the confidence is in the sector to keep improving and increasing the production, but those targets will become harder to meet. In England, as has already been quoted, the amount of planting that has continuously happened has fallen far, far short of the targets. For us to increase on the back of an English target unfortunately becomes harder to sustain.



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Q92 **Julian Sturdy:** The bottom line is that you can have these targets and schemes, but, if people are not prepared to take these schemes up, we are not going to meet the targets, are we? You, as nursery providers and growers, need that confidence that those can be met before you buy into it, in a way, or start planning for it.

**Brian Fraser:** We are in the stage where we are having to be reactionary, rather than proactive. We are waiting to see where the lead comes. If clients of BSW and of Caroline come forward and look for trees, we will look to carry on increasing, but we have been caught. We have been here before. The number of times that we have tried to increase our production and not had the plants taken up is numbers of years. The final point is that the most expensive tree we produce is the one we do not sell.

Q93 **Julian Sturdy:** Yes, exactly. There is an element of “once bitten, twice shy” involved in this as well.

**Brian Fraser:** Yes, or third, fourth or fifth time, to be fair.

**Chair:** I think Caroline wants to come in and then I will come back to Brian with one last question on this.

**Caroline Ayre:** It is actually my own question. We have a nursery notification system being developed within England. That is Defra, ADAS and another consultancy company looking at sort of a dating system, matching supply with demand. I actually want Brian’s thoughts on that. Scotland has very clear figures on what planting schemes are, what the species are, what the species breakdowns are and what the nurseries can plan. In England and Wales, we do not have that. We do not have the data.

Q94 **Chair:** I will add to your question, Caroline, to Brian, which is an unusual way for witnesses to ask each other questions, but I am quite happy for that to happen. Brian and Caroline, the problem you have is that we are not sure in England how much land we actually have to plant these trees on. The whole thing becomes unanswerable in a way. How do you get your data? Hopefully people will take up the schemes, but we do not entirely know. Lastly, to Brian’s question, I suppose different species take longer to grow before they can be planted out. I imagine oaks and others probably take longer than perhaps sycamore and what have you. Is that the case?

**Brian Fraser:** Yes, different trees take longer to grow. If there is a requirement for certain species, the timeframes for those plants to be available will be longer. That is very true.

With regard to notification, the earlier that nurseries are involved in any scheme, the better, so that we can get a feel of what is coming down the track at us. That goes from a Government point of view as well. If Government are talking of planting 10,000 hectares in England alone, we need to be involved and to know that that is what is being planned, not



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three months before it happens. It needs to be in the planning stage. I appreciate that is difficult when you have Ministers changing left, right and centre, but we need to be involved.

**Chair:** That message comes through loud and clear. I suspect we will put something in our report regarding that, so thank you all for that evidence.

Q95 **Dave Doogan:** Thank you, colleagues, for the evidence today. My question is really concerning the balance of commercial and non-commercial planting, and the ability of that balance to strike alignment with the UK's need to meet net zero and, as well as that, biodiversity objectives. In answering that, maybe you could explain a little about the commercial pressure versus the utility that we enjoy environmentally from the natural environment, a principal element of which is, of course, trees.

**Hamish Macleod:** This is the \$64,000 question: why forestry? I always like to think that our forest creation is about consensus. Caroline mentioned the UK forestry standard, which underpins everything that we do. For the last 30-odd years, we, as a commercial user of forestry, have understood and lived with the limitations, if you would like to call it that, of what we can do in terms of productive forestry, between the more commercial softwoods and other species.

We have also developed better tree development in our nurseries. We are getting a better productive tree from our forests, so that is helping us as well.

The commercial challenge for us right now, at the moment, is actually keeping up with the huge demand for timber in the UK. That is whether you are a sawmill, a panel or chipboard manufacturer, or whatever. In terms of moving forward and giving us all confidence commercially, there is an appetite to grow more productive forestry within the UK. We are encouraging that all the time.

We are reaching a point where the annual increment has just about peaked, so therefore we are not going to produce much more than the 12 million cubic metres a year of roundwood softwood we are producing at the moment. That means that we have a finite supply to live with for the next probably 20 years or so, which is why it is important for us to actually plan forwards and have more new woodland creation, to see us through into the next generation of timber.

Getting to net zero is important for us, in terms of locking up carbon in homes and the products we produce. It is also important in the way we produce it, reducing the logistics and the carbon usage within our mills, transport and everything else. We see it in the complete round. That would be our sector's approach to meeting those sorts of targets. We just need the tree planting to round that up, thank you very much.



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**Caroline Ayre:** There is a perpetual dichotomy between commercial productive and biodiversity-rich unproductive. That is not helpful. That is not where the industry is. We have been practising multi-purpose, multi-objective, multi-outcome forestry for 30 years now. A UKFS compliant scheme can only be a certain percentage of conifers or one species, whatever conifer or hardwood. It has to have open space. It has to have riparian zones within a modern plan.

The bottom line is that, within England, only 30% of all the woodland creation is conifers. We are facing a raw materials crisis quite quickly. Anybody who is a farmer and trying to get hold of fencing will know right now that it is very difficult and expensive.

I want to also, if I may, correct an evidence session where one of your witnesses intimated that most of UK softwood supply goes into chip. That is absolutely not the case. That is like putting a sheep into mince, rather than optimal cuts. That is not what we do. So 8% goes into chip, but most goes into sawmills, into panel, into wood fuel or fencing and shavings. I can give those breakdowns of forestry statistics. It is there. Those were out on 31 May, so it is all there to see where those breakdowns are.

Of course, if you are looking at carbon, how much carbon is locked up in harvested wood products is often ignored. Then you go into the cascade of wood use and the use of timber post-life. I wanted to put that on record.

Q96 **Chair:** I am sorry to interrupt you, Caroline. If you would like to give those figures in writing please, we will put them in our records, so that is fine. Thank you. Is there anything else you want to add, because Dave might like to come back, I expect?

**Dave Doogan:** I am conscious that Caroline was mid-flow there. If you want to get to the end of that response, that is fine.

**Caroline Ayre:** Woodlands are established or trees are planted for the multiple benefits they can provide. That is incumbent on them becoming a woodland. To do that, it needs management. I do not think we are having a question on woodland management, but that is so important. Some 80% of what we have in England is not managed and that is criminal. We cannot continue to perpetuate that.

Q97 **Dave Doogan:** That moves on to the second part of this question, which, as you would imagine, is not unrelated. It is a question around about UK Government and so, in this instance, English Government policy. Is it doing enough to create demand for more domestic production and the use of domestically-produced timber in the England trees action plan? On that, Hamish, I think that BSW is in Latvia and Slovenia. Is that correct? I think you operate there too.

**Hamish Macleod:** Correct, yes, in Latvia certainly.



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Q98 **Dave Doogan:** Do you import raw timber and process it in the UK? Is that something that could be expanded upon? Whereas we might not have the raw timber, we certainly have the processing capacity.

**Hamish Macleod:** We certainly bring in sawn timber from Latvia. We bring that into Carlisle for distribution to our UK customers.

Q99 **Dave Doogan:** I might suggest to you at this point that Montrose Port is much closer to Latvia than Carlisle. I can put you in touch with the harbourmaster, should you wish.

**Chair:** Stop trading while you are on the Committee, Dave, but that is a good question.

**Hamish Macleod:** Just repeating what I was saying, the market in the UK is strong. We can meet about 40% of this \*inaudible\*[15.35.12] timber market. The balance of that is coming mostly from Sweden and the Baltics. That will continue for a number of years, so long as the UK's demand for timber is retained. The UK is the second largest importer of timber in the world, according to the national statistics. We are big users here. There is a huge domestic market opportunity for growing trees. We grow trees very well in the UK and produce a quality product, which is fit for purpose for construction and for building homes that we all desperately need.

Q100 **Dave Doogan:** On that, Caroline, accepting perhaps that the UK will always be a net importer of timber—I do not know if it is possible to be self sufficient or self-reliant in timber—in terms of the proportion we produce domestically across the different nations of the United Kingdom, do you think UK Government policy in this area is sufficient to lift that domestic production to a great extent over the next couple of generations?

**Caroline Ayre:** No, I do not, simply put.

**Chair:** That was a very concise answer there, Caroline. That is probably a good place to finish our session. Can I thank you, Caroline, Hamish and Brian for a very thoughtful and good evidence session? It will be very good stuff for our report, so we very much appreciate your time this afternoon. Thank you, Caroline, for questioning the witness panel. That was really good, so thank you very much. I am only teasing you; do not worry. The thing is that, as I said at the beginning, it is very much like a think tank process and that is what it was this afternoon. I thank you all very much for a really good session. Thank you all three very much.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Shireen Chambers, David Sutherland and Jen Turner.

Q101 **Chair:** Our next panel carrying on talking about trees and woodland is Shireen Chambers, David Sutherland and Jen Turner.





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**Shireen Chambers:** Good afternoon. I am Shireen Chambers, the executive director of the Institute of Chartered Foresters. We are the royal chartered body for tree professionals, foresters and arboriculturists in the UK.

**Jen Turner:** Hello, I am Jen Turner. I am the development manager for the Royal Forestry Society. We are the largest forestry charity working to share knowledge about the art and science of woodland management and nurture forestry skills.

**David Sutherland:** Good afternoon. I am David Sutherland. I am head of climate change and environment at Buckinghamshire Council. This afternoon I am here on behalf of ADEPT, which is effectively the association that represents directors of place services from county councils, unitary councils and combined authorities. They are all those place-shaping services from planning to transport as well.

Q102 **Chair:** We will probably ask you some particular questions about urban tree planting and the like in a minute, as you can imagine.

My first question is mainly to Shireen and Jen, but, David, you are happy to answer if you want to. Does the new England trees action plan include the right measures to support forestry and farming to deliver the tree planting target? It is quite similar question to the one the other panel had.

**Jen Turner:** We welcome the England trees action plan. Lots in it is good. We are concerned about the targets, as previous witnesses in the last session have confirmed, as well. It is much more realistic that we should be planting 6,000 to 10,000 hectares of trees by 2030 and not in the next three to four years.

There are some things to be positive about. There is lots of mention of the right tree in the right place, and there are lots of positive actions to do that. I would like to hear more talk about the right tree, the right place, the right purpose and the right care. That is an awful lot of extra things to do.

In terms of the RFS's involvement, we welcome the steps towards supporting the forestry skills forum and the forestry skills action plan. We have some ideas as to what can be done there to help address the shortages that we think we are going to see in terms of skilled and unskilled forestry workers.

Q103 **Chair:** Thank you. Before I move to Shireen, you made an interesting comment there very matter-of-factly. You said we had more chance of hitting the target by 2030 than we had by 2024. That is a really bold statement to make. You really are very uncertain of the speed, or you are quite certain the speeds are going to be quite slow. You may as well put it on record because we are taking evidence this afternoon.



**Jen Turner:** We are more worried that there is this impetus to get trees in the ground at the moment, almost at any cost. We are really certain that we need to iron out the problems that we are seeing. We already have problems with supply and skills. We need to iron out these problems before we can start really nailing our targets up there for everyone to see. It is going to be a big challenge. It is potentially doable, but it will need a colossal effort from everyone involved.

**Chair:** You have to have availability of land, availability for trees and availability of planting them. In Governments of all colours, we are in the business of ticking boxes and saying we are going to plant so many trees. Whether we can achieve that is quite interesting.

**Shireen Chambers:** I would echo that. We all know woodlands are not created in terms of political cycles. Before this Committee, I was trying to find out where these targets came from. The previous panel mentioned that they were aspirations that became targets. There was a bidding war at one point. It is hard to see where the evidence is to say that these targets are realistic. It is a great idea to work toward something, but I just fully echo what Jen was saying. It is going to be extremely difficult.

Some of my concern arises from the availability of land and trees, as we heard about, but also all the other things like the complexity of the incentives. The England woodland creation offer has been generally well received. It has just come out. ELM is ongoing. You have heard from the previous panel that there has been collaboration, but we are concerned about how that is going to link to nature recovery, biodiversity net gain and countryside stewardship. It is still not clear how this is going to work with others.

Crucially, how is it all going to make sense to the applicant? If it does not, none of this is going to work. That is what we still have concerns about. As Caroline put it, the truth is in the pudding. We will see how it comes out. That would be the first thing to say in terms of incentives, which is what your question was originally asking.

Q104 **Chair:** Yes. You are saying quite clearly that, as it stands at the moment, it is not attractive or concise enough. Everything that is going on with Government at the moment is laudable, but the practicalities are not there.

I was going to make the point that you made. In the general election, it became almost laughable. Every day, each political party was going to plant some more trees. I kept saying to myself, "Where on earth are all these trees going to be planted and how quickly can we plant them?" We are getting to a stage now where we have to work out how that works. You quite like the English tree plan, but you still have some reservations over the speed of it all. Would that be a fair comment?

**Shireen Chambers:** Speed is one thing. Yes, the institute is very supportive of it. It gives, for the first time, a bit more co-ordination to



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what we want to see in terms of trees and woodland in England. An awful lot of what you have talked about before—I gave evidence at your rural skills panel—is not up to Defra.

Defra has also been very clear that the England trees action plan is a cross-Government document and action plan. How does it work with others? For example, Defra is not responsible for skills. We have talked to it for quite some time now on how we develop skills. It is working with the Forestry Skills Forum to develop a plan, but developing a plan is one thing.

There already is a plan. It is a bit out of date now, but implementing that plan is absolutely key. For that, we are going to need the Department for Education. We are going to need BEIS. We are going to need other organisations. How is that cross-Government working going to develop these skills that we have already talked about and your own Committee has looked at? It is not simply up to Defra, and that is where I have concerns.

**Q105 Chair:** David, does the English tree planting scheme cross over to urban-type schemes or not? Is there any cross-connection or joining up there?

**David Sutherland:** It does. Coming back to right tree, right place, local authorities, place making in their role as planning authorities, have a really fundamental role to play in this. Look at the other policies that are coming forward from Defra for the Environment Bill, be it by biodiversity net gain, the requirement of local authorities to produce local nature recovery strategies, the environmental land management system or the changes to the planning regime. Local authorities have a key role to play in that.

I will point specifically at local nature recovery strategies. The whole idea behind these under the Environment Bill is that they are spatial plans for nature. It talks about nature. It is looking at the natural capital of a local area, and setting out what is good locally and should be protected locally. More importantly, just to feed into this debate in terms of the right tree and the right place, you could extend that to the right habitat and the right place. What are you creating?

The whole idea of these is pulling together all the various datasets that are out there to identify the opportunities that make sense at a local level. Where should we invest the money, whether it be from net gain, ELM or private finance? Where should that money be targeted? The whole idea is that this is then informing that process. We know that, at a local level, it makes sense for a connectivity and a habitat where those trees should be planted.

For me, the production of those nature recovery strategies has a key role to play in bringing this wider picture together, and almost channelling the “where” and how it is financed. That could be urban areas. As you say, the whole point is a spatial plan that covers local areas. That should in



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theory, I suppose, help inform how those national targets can be delivered at local level.

**Chair:** Yes, we will probably go into a bit more detail on that.

Q106 **Dave Doogan:** I just wanted to ask our witnesses if it was their understanding that the 30,000 hectares related to the whole of the UK or England only.

**Jen Turner:** It is my understanding that it relates to the whole of the UK.

Q107 **Dave Doogan:** That is my understanding as well. Given that the Scottish Government's target—and this is a believable target given past performance—is 15,000 hectares per year going forwards, that only leaves 15,000 hectares for the other three constituent nations of the United Kingdom. Are we being too pessimistic to think we are going to miss that? Is it, as you suggest, a target based more in abstract than operational likelihood?

**Jen Turner:** Yes, it is potentially achievable. But by setting it arbitrarily at 10,000 hectares per year, for example, for England, you are forgetting that we need sort out all these issues we have with finding the land, the trees and the people to do all this work. It would be better, in my view, to set our sights a little lower initially and then ramp it up as we go forward. Why are we saying 10,000 hectares per year? We could be saying, "We are at 2,000 hectares now. Let us go for 4,000 hectares in the next couple of years, and then ramp it up to something more like Scotland is delivering in the future".

Q108 **Dave Doogan:** Why do you think it would take England so long to catch up with Scotland?

**Jen Turner:** In terms of the grant systems, the grants seem to be more easily accessible in Scotland. There are plenty of reasons. I could put some more written evidence forward if you wanted that.

**Dave Doogan:** That would be helpful, thank you.

**Chair:** I do not know whether Shireen wants to make any comment.

**Shireen Chambers:** As a UK body, we span all four countries. Hamish said it quite clearly in the previous panel. Political support has been there, and very strong political support. There is also more land availability that is suitable for tree growing and a less dense population; we cannot ignore that.

Q109 **Dave Doogan:** How far does the England trees action plan go to address any concerns that you have about the lack of a skilled forestry workforce?

**Jen Turner:** The steps outlined in the England trees action plan are all good steps. The forestry skills forum certainly has a critical role to play in helping to address this skills gap, but I would be concerned that there is no guarantee of funding for this. There are plenty of things that the



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forestry skills forum would like to try and to pilot. At the moment, we are relying on a small amount of private investment to get this done.

For example, I have just secured around £20,000 from a private investor to do a very low-level pilot of a new level 1 qualification that will provide a clear pathway for underrepresented groups and those not in education, employment or training to get into careers in forestry. Yes, I would question how this is going to be funded. A huge amount of investment is needed right now to address the skills gaps that we are going to see in the future.

**Shireen Chambers:** The simple answer is that there has not been any funding allocated to us. Developing a plan is wonderful, but how do we implement it? For example, I understand about £21 million has been allocated to nurseries to try to develop the issues that you explored in the first panel. But nothing has been allocated to addressing these skills, presumably because it is not seen as Defra's job. Education and skills are not its job.

Whose is it? This is what I said earlier. Where is the cross-Government work on this? Where are we finding this money to develop these skills? Who is paying for that and who is responsible for it?

**Chair:** That is a very good point, yes.

**David Sutherland:** I will just add the local authority side in terms of skills. Local authorities clearly manage their own tree stock, which is a very large tree stock, in terms of parks, gardens and along highways. In terms of our regulatory role, there is a lot of involvement by local authorities in how we interact with the development industry when scrutinising and advising on schemes. You need that specialist ecology arboricultural officer support in local authorities. It has diminished, and they have a key role to play in the process.

The other thing to point out is that many authorities, in response to their climate change action plans, are going down the route of implementing their own tree planting schemes. They are having to go through the process of almost joining where we are planting on our own landholdings. Those skills are needed within those local authorities in terms of how we are procuring trees and coming forward with the creation plans on our own landholdings. That is an emerging role for local authorities. Clearly, the role we play in the regulatory phase with development is absolutely fundamental in this process.

Q110 **Dave Doogan:** Further to that, David, is it your understanding that local authorities in England have adequately resourced and skilled workforces to meet the responsibility? We have had year-on-year challenging budget settlements for local councils. In the eyes of the public, when it comes to the council setting its budget, there is social care; there is education; there are open spaces. All these priorities come before trees. Do you think they have an adequate resource? Are they marshalling it properly?



**David Sutherland:** It is a very good question. In short, no. How the planning system treats ancient woodland is a really good example. You need that fundamental specialist support to advise planners. A survey was carried out by the Woodland Trust a couple of years ago and 96% of planners knew about the term "ancient woodland". Only 33% knew of the ancient woodland inventory. It is crucial to have that specialist in-house support, so that you have support there to advise the planners.

ADEPT is doing a piece of work at the moment to look at whether local authorities are prepared to deliver biodiversity net gain, which this will help to support. It is clear that many authorities now lack ecologists in terms of being able to support that process. It is really key that you have that capacity there to support these key policies.

Q111 **Dave Doogan:** When do you see that returning?

**David Sutherland:** The Government are promising, under the Environment Bill, new burdens payments to local authorities to be able to deliver the likes of biodiversity net gain. That will not necessarily cover arboricultural officers, but that is crucial to be able to deliver these big policy issues.

If I give you one more example of where that is breaking down at the moment, trees lost prior to development are a really key issue in terms of development sites losing trees before we get to the planning stage. That linkage between Forestry Commission officers and trees in understanding the felling licences has broken down over time. That needs to be re-established so that planners are aware if felling licences are in place, or, if they are not, what enforcement action to do. That is a real problem in terms of trees being lost prior to development.

**Shireen Chambers:** Quite a few of our members work in local authorities and we know the pressure they have been under. Some have lost their jobs and are now working privately. Many local authorities do not even employ a specialist tree professional at all in planning or leisure and recreation departments. Those who are there are feeling under huge pressure and unrecognised.

**Chair:** Yes, those points are well made.

Q112 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you to our witnesses for being with us this afternoon. I am going to touch on a sentence or phrase that has been used a lot already: "the right tree in the right place". You have talked about it in some of your previous answers. What practically are the key things that we need to do to make sure that this phrase "planting the right tree in the right place" comes to fruition? If I could start with you, Jen, in your introductory comments, you expanded on "the right tree in the right place" and added a few extra bits to the sentence. What are the key things we have to do to make this work?

**Jen Turner:** It is about the right tree in the right place, but it should also be about the right purpose and the right care. There is absolutely no



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point in planting trees if you do not know why you are planting them, you do not know how to care for them, or you have nobody there to care for them. It is multifaceted.

A recent survey of RFS members showed that there is an appetite for tree planting. Many of our members are landowners or land managers, and 42% of our respondents said that they would like to create new woodlands, but the barriers to creating new woodlands were just too great. The grant systems were potentially too complicated, or too expensive, to access. They did not have the skills or knowledge to understand tools that Forestry England have been providing that help them choose the right trees for their soils, for example. The ecological site classification tool is quite complex to understand.

We are going to need a lot of investment in helping to upskill landowners, and this includes farmers as well, not just foresters, to help access these tools, and make sure that they are making really well informed decisions about the trees that they are planting, and not just the trees that have grown well in the past. We now have to think about climate change, pests and diseases.

What trees are going to grow well into the future? Think about 50 to 80 years in the lifetime of a tree. It is not very long, and that is the timescale we are looking at for really rapid climate change that could affect the growth of lots of our native broad-leaf trees. We have to think really long and hard about it. On top of that, there are mapping issues, which I am sure David will help you out with later.

**Q113 Dr Hudson:** Thank you. That is really helpful. Before I bring in David and Shireen, I just want to explore one point you made there about the purpose. One huge particular issue up in my part of the world in Cumbria is flooding. We know the benefits of tree planting for the environment, biodiversity, carbon, et cetera, but also in terms of flood mitigation. That is something that folk in Cumbria are keen to explore.

That ties in with what you are saying about the purpose, but how do we get that right? How do we get that joined up with the different agencies and landowners working to put the trees in the right place to potentially have flood mitigation? Do you have any thoughts you want to put on record about how we get that process right to make sure that the purpose is enacted?

**Shireen Chambers:** Use professionals. I do not mean to be bland about this, or trite at all, but, frankly, that is why we have specialist professionals. Of course you can plant woodlands for flood prevention. If you know how to, it is reasonably easy, but you need to know that is your purpose and objective.

Woodlands are absolutely wonderful things. They can do much more than just have one objective. They can do more than that. You can also plant these woodlands with a primary purpose of flood prevention. You will



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need to make sure you choose the right species for that soil that will tolerate whatever flooding you are getting but will also withstand whatever weather is going on there.

If you plan it right, plant it right and know your silviculture, you can also thin those woodlands and get wood products out of them. You can also manage them in such a way as to maximise carbon. You can maximise biodiversity. They are amazingly wonderful things, but you need to know what you are doing.

**Dr Hudson:** You are talking multipurpose there.

**Shireen Chambers:** I believe that all woodland should be multipurpose, but I believe strongly that some will have a very clear objective. For a farmer, it might well be for shelter. It may be to create fenceposts. For a cultivation organisation, it might be primarily for biodiversity. That does not mean to say we cannot create other things from it. This is my point: can we afford not to make them multipurpose, especially using public money?

Q114 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you. That is really helpful. Jen, did you have any points to make about purpose, or has Shireen covered that for you?

**Jen Turner:** Absolutely, Shireen has got it bang on. Yes, it is all about making sure that you have a primary purpose for your woodland, but you are maximising the benefits, and the tools and professional help that you have available. But that is going to need some investment.

**David Sutherland:** Just picking up your specific point about flooding, I will go back to my earlier point about local nature recovery strategies. For me, this is where you pull together all of those datasets. We in Buckinghamshire have been grateful to be a pilot for one of these, and I know Cornwall has been a pilot for one of the local nature recovery strategies. You are picking up all these ecosystem service datasets in terms of your natural capital and your flooding.

You are then overlaying where it makes best sense to invest money. It could be in woodland, but it could be habitat. The maps are indicating where we have flooding problems and where it makes sense to channel that investment. Those multiple benefits, and those multiple environment benefits, are pulled together and extrapolated as part of that process.

That is certainly what the learning has been as part of the pilots. It is a tool that can be really powerful to bring together those various datasets so you can inform: "Where does it make sense to invest money in terms of woodland or other habitat to address flooding?" That is some of the learning that has come out of the pilots. That is where I think it will happen.

Q115 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you. That is really helpful. There are multiple benefits and purposes. As Shireen said, we should employ professionals.





Can I ask a final, quick supplementary along those lines? In terms of the right tree in the right place, up and down the country, you will sometimes find communities split. Some people want them; some people do not. If there are many benefits and purposes, do you have any thoughts you could put on record about how that can be articulated to communities, so that communities come on board and you get a consensus to say, "Yes, tree planting here will help us on many levels"?

**Shireen Chambers:** For all public grants going out for woodland creation, stakeholder engagement is a necessary part of it. Any professional will embrace that. Most of our members have certainly been trained in it. Talking to people, of course people will always want different objectives. The landowner and the fund-giver have to be key, but a local community needs to support what is happening. Otherwise, it will never work.

One thing most people do not like is change, whether it is creating woodlands or taking away woodlands. Communication is key. Most forestry professionals who are working in woodland creation and management are also trained in stakeholder engagement.

**Jen Turner:** Forestry has a real image problem. As Shireen was saying, planting trees can be problematic. Cutting them down is also very problematic. A targeted marketing campaign to show that cutting down trees is not only essential, but provides environmental benefits, could be really well placed at this time.

Q116 **Chair:** Just before we leave this one, the problem is that, when you cut woodland down, it is extremely ugly to look at. The public go by these cut-down woods and forests and say, "That is dreadful". How do we get this message over loud and clear that we are going to replant, that that carbon is now going to be used in building materials, and so on? How do we get that over better to the public? They drive along, see a forest cut down and say how dreadful that is.

**Jen Turner:** We could do a lot to address the opinions of young people about chopping down trees. There is a lot of damaging marketing material out there at the moment. Our learning and outreach manager told me that, in her daughter's school, there is a poster that says that cutting down trees is bad for the environment. That is really not helpful when we are looking at these potentially wonderful sources of sustainable building materials that can lock up carbon for hundreds and hundreds of years.

We could do an awful lot to address the opinions of young people. There is so much that could be done. Just posters in schools could help. They seem to be imparting messages on the other side.

Q117 **Chair:** That is right, yes. David, we have to be much smarter with planting trees in towns, cities and villages. The trouble is that you plant a tree and, if it is the wrong type of tree, it grows far too big. All sorts of



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people come along to see their local MP, i.e. me, and say, "We want this tree cut down because it is a danger". We have new varieties of trees about. How do we balance the fact that a slower-growing tree and a smaller tree do not take out as much carbon? There has to be a compromise here somewhere. How do we deal with that in an urban environment?

**David Sutherland:** You are right. Clearly, trees in an urban environment play a fundamental role in terms of air pollution, amenity and preventing flooding. Managing street trees and urban trees is a real issue for local authorities. There is pressure on the revenue budgets. Decision-making at local authorities does not take account of the wider benefits that those trees provide.

Only yesterday, the Government responded to the Dasgupta review commissioned by the Treasury in terms of how we factor those wider benefits into decisions. That is a particularly good one around street trees. They take a lot of planning. You need to build the design specs into design guides: "Are your pavements wide enough? Are they being put away from services?" All those practical things make it really hard to retrofit. For instance, we are in discussions with a number of community groups about how they want to plant on the highway verge. There are all these barriers: "You have to scan for the services". You have all those practical things that you need to do, which just makes it hard to do that.

Yes, it is really important. The planning White Paper is making a commitment to tree-lined avenues. There is a really big commitment in there. That is featured in the Environment Bill and design codes coming out as well. Those things definitely need to be thought about because trees absolutely play a fundamental role in improving the health and wellbeing of people who live in close proximity to those. You are right. It is a difficult area, but one that definitely needs to be looked at.

Q118 **Chair:** I see Shireen wants to come in. The point I would make to you is that you are quite right. Trees are lovely, but tree roots can be hugely damaging at times to infrastructure and the like, even the foundations. We have to be careful with all this. Some roots run along the ground and all sorts of things.

**Shireen Chambers:** It is about communication. There are many wonderful examples around the world in cities. People have put signs on trees in New York, for example, saying exactly how much they are worth. They say how many children's lives they saved who have not died from asthma and how much air conditioning is not needed in the local buildings around them. In Melbourne, the local communities wrote to their trees and saved them from being removed.

People do not know the benefits of them. A lot of them can just see the tree roots, the subsidence and the bird droppings. When they start to work between Government Departments and see how much health



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money is saved by trees, it starts making sense. That is what you need to put across to decision-makers.

**Chair:** That is a really good point, thank you.

**David Sutherland:** To the other points made before, street trees require long-term maintenance. That is a real issue. With local authority budgets being cut, if we are putting new street trees in, we need to think about how they are being paid for. Is that commuted sums from development just to make sure that those street trees are being maintained? That is definitely an issue.

**Chair:** Again, that is another good point. Thank you all for some really good points.

Q119 **Dave Doogan:** Thanks to all three of our witnesses. How well is UK Government policy funding and supporting the management of existing woodland? Does the England trees action plan address any shortcomings in that respect?

**Jen Turner:** It goes some way to addressing the complete lack of management. We all know that, in England and the UK in general, our woodlands are chronically undermanaged. If we did bring our woodlands into management, we would see so much more in terms of multiple benefits, which we have been talking about a lot.

The England trees action plan addresses some of the issues around maintenance. We now have some maintenance grants that people can access for establishment and ongoing maintenance of trees, but we also have this conflicting desire to get lots of trees in the ground. There are going to be a lot of trees planted that are at risk of being unmanaged or undermanaged in the future. There are multiple reasons for that. There is this whole emphasis on planting trees purely for wildlife, and not thinking about the wider benefits and how that woodland pays for itself in the long term.

There is also a lack of skills. Again, I am coming back to a lack of skills to manage these trees. Where are the people who are going to look after these trees? There are so many. The pathways into forestry careers are so unclear at all levels. Looking at secondary schools, people who want a career change into forestry, and people who want to go to university, the pathways just are not there. They are not clear, and they are quite difficult to access.

**Shireen Chambers:** It all stems to the real disconnect between people and understanding of anything rural these days. We have become such an urban society. There is certainly a lack of understanding about forestry, woodlands and trees. Most schoolchildren think it is wrong to fell a tree. Therefore, they do not even understand what woodland management is.



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Many landowners have woodland. If it is a farmer, it could just be a scrubby bit in the bottom of their field that is no good for their crops that they got a grant to put trees on. Some think that is fine for biodiversity, but it does not help that owner understand that that woodland could be so much more. There is a lack of education and a big disconnect. We need to address that, and that will happen through education.

**Q120 Dave Doogan:** Taking that point about the lack of education and understanding about realising the full potential, is the England trees action plan found wanting in that respect in particular?

**Shireen Chambers:** It is making the right noises. Like Jen was saying, the emphasis is all on creating woodland. Given that the England trees action plan and the Government's real drive at the moment is about trying to get to net zero, woodland management is a real way forward that is a bit of a missed opportunity here.

**David Sutherland:** Reference was made earlier on that there are multiple interests and landowners in terms of woodland, particularly around the urban fringe areas where they are not being managed. I will give you an example of the need for local advice and support. In the Chilterns, there is a farm cluster that has come together in terms of advice and support. You could extend that.

It is mentioned in the England woodland creation offer that you are bringing these smaller owners together and providing them with advice at a local level. That would make sense because accessing that local advice has worked well as a model. I am conscious that it is a different aspect of managing nature, but it is to do with farmers knowing to do the right thing. The same could apply for small woodland owners doing the right thing as well.

**Q121 Dave Doogan:** David, do the current and proposed planning rules provide good enough protection for the ancient trees and woodlands?

**David Sutherland:** Look at the scale of biodiversity loss. I am conscious that trees are part of that. You would have to say, and there are multiple reasons for it, that the planning system has not provided adequate protection for that. I talked earlier about how 43% of illegal felling is prior to development, which is not great. In our preparation for delivering biodiversity net gain under the Environment Bill, we looked at planning applications that were coming through the system in terms of small and medium-sized applications, and they all delivered a net loss. That is just an incremental loss of biodiversity over time.

The tree preservation order system, again, is probably not fit for purpose at the moment. In terms of its criteria of assessment, it is around amenity and visual. We have been talking a lot about the multiple benefits. That feels very dated now in terms of being able to protect trees for all their ecosystem services. In terms of how local authorities are



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using those tools, we can be more proactive. There is definitely a need to review that as a tool in the planning system.

Looking ahead to the planning White Paper that is out, the Government have made a commitment of 30% of land for nature conservation. If I give that as an example in Buckinghamshire, that is effectively a doubling of high-quality, priority habitats. What is not clear, I suppose, in the planning White Paper is how those protections of ancient woodlands and the aspirations of the Environment Bill are going to weave in with the planning White Paper. They have to be more than existing. There is a zoning approach, but nature does not necessarily happily fit with a zoning approach.

That relationship has to be explored. How are we building into the new planning White Paper and the new infrastructure standards to make sure those urban areas have been designed in the right way? How are we bringing in all the importance of those design features we talked about? It is a bit of an unknown. The planning White Paper is quite vague on the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and climate change. That has to be at the heart of the planning system because it is such an important tool for delivering these things.

More clarity is definitely needed. The tools under the Environment Bill are coming. The clarity that is required is how they are going to be implemented as part of the new planning White Paper.

**Shireen Chambers:** Do not get hung up on just ancient woodland. Protections can be afforded to trees and planning for flood prevention, pollution reduction and all these really important reasons, which are not as emotive as ancient woodlands, but are just as important to our communities and society.

Q122 **Chair:** Farmers will plant bits of trees in odd corners that are difficult to plough or get into, and then they will probably just leave them. I suspect we probably need to not only have a grant for planting the tree, but a grant for managing it as well. Give them a carrot as well as a stick, I would have thought. What do you think?

**Shireen Chambers:** Yes, and there are woodland management grants, so that is in hand. It is not like anyone is ignoring that. The Forestry Commission and other public bodies have been giving out management grants for some time.

It is more than that; it is a cultural change. The farmer needs to see the worth of it. Obviously not all but, at the minute, a lot of trees are just getting stuck in corners because they can. We need a step change if these targets are to be met. We need to see landowners, including a lot of farmers, want to plant trees for a different reason. That is a cultural change. There is no way that happens within political cycles. That does not even sometimes happen within generational cycles. Some of these tasks we have are pretty uphill.



**Chair:** I started off my life cutting down trees; I now plant them. When I was a young farmer, they were in my way, and so I removed them. Now I would plant them. It is interesting, really. You make a really interesting cultural point. Yes, we will do our best to educate the farmers. That will be interesting, will it not? I can say that as a farmer myself. I had better move quickly on to the last question.

Q123 **Rosie Duffield:** A lot of this has been covered. Originally, the question was aimed at David. What are the key barriers to expanding urban woodlands and street trees? Will the England trees action plan help to overcome them? I guess, because you have mentioned so many barriers and you have had such great answers from everyone on the panel, do you just want to give us a specific answer about the main barriers and how they might be overcome so we can just summarise that?

**David Sutherland:** That is absolutely fine. I will give an element of the answer that I have not provided before, if that is okay.

**Rosie Duffield:** Yes.

**David Sutherland:** We have talked about the various funding streams that have opened up and how that impacts in terms of the private markets. From a local authority level, numerous funding streams have been opened up by Defra. We have the urban tree challenge fund that is available. We have had the local authority treescapes fund. My concern, and the feedback I am getting from many local authorities, is again that certainty.

The local authority treescapes fund is a one-year fund. It has three years' maintenance. Many local authorities are simply just not going to bid for it because they do not have the capacity to bid for it and the timings are too short. They do not have that certainty in terms of those maintenance liabilities that I talked about. Many authorities are not going to bid for that particular pot of funding, which is a really important pot. It is about the non-woodland planting, but there is literally, as you say, the capacity to pool. Some authorities will have the capacity in place to do that, so probably the bigger authorities, and the rest will probably not be doing it.

The new funding is great. We will just say, as a policy certainty for local authorities, you want that certainty in the long term, not just as a one-year pot of funding where you are then left with a maintenance liability. That will be the plea. Is there more of a way that you can provide, from a local authority perspective, that certainty of funding into the long term?

I have just mentioned two particular funds, which local authorities are bidding into and I have received feedback on. The last one I would add is that there are issues with supply. For that last fund, Defra is saying, "You have to plant this planting season". Many local authorities are struggling to be able to procure in time to be able to get the supply. That is a funding issue as opposed to the practical issues of avoiding services, maintenance and so forth. I did not mention that earlier on.



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**Rosie Duffield:** That is really helpful because obviously, as MPs, we would want our local authorities to be encouraged to bid for these schemes. If there is this disconnect, it is our job to feed that back to Defra and say, "We want to encourage this, but there are these barriers". That is really useful to know. Thank you so much.

Q124 **Chair:** What about Shireen and Jen? Are there any comments you would like to make on that last question, or general comments now as we move towards the end?

**Jen Turner:** Yes. If I could just pick up on David's point about supply, one of the potential solutions is to offer contract grows to nurseries. They had a very successful scheme in Scotland. A supply of all trees, and not just urban trees, is going to be an issue. That is a potential solution.

I would also just like to revisit ongoing management. A lot of the grants that people can access for ongoing management are for new woodland creation schemes only. There is no grant support available from the Government at the moment for replanting woodland that has come to commercial end of life and is going to the sawmill.

We should think long and hard about those woodlands as well because there is an obligation to replant them, but there is no support available to show people what the right tree in the place with the right care and the right purpose looks like anymore. All of this needs careful thought. If we can invest more in looking after the woodlands that we already have, as well as making sure that the woodlands that are being created are going to be well looked after into the future, that will be an absolutely marvellous thing.

Q125 **Rosie Duffield:** Thanks. Jen, can I just ask, why is it there that disconnect? Is it because you think that Defra has not consulted experts like you guys properly, and it has just made a gesture rather than drilled down to those details? Is it just an oversight? Are they prepared to listen when you feed that back?

**Jen Turner:** We have been feeding this back. All of the forestry organisations that I know have been feeding this back for a long time. Access to grants is expensive, difficult, complicated and subject to windows of application times. We have been feeding this back for a long time, but there is obviously pressure from each Government to say, "We want to be seen planting trees. Where there are already trees, do we really have a problem?" When people have to make hard choices about where the funding goes, it always seems to go to creation rather than to management.

Q126 **Chair:** That is a really good point, is it not, Rosie? I feel something coming on in our report on this one.

**Rosie Duffield:** Me too.



**Shireen Chambers:** I will just add to that because it is the point I want to make. It is a disconnect, not with Defra at all, but between society and woodlands. Generally, we do not understand them. We think it is great to have trees, but for managing them we think, "They just do that themselves, do they not?" It is just this lack of understanding about what we use woodlands for and all the benefits that we have spoken about.

Even looking at my screen, some of you are wearing wooden products. Do you know that viscose comes from wood products? Do you know that your toothpaste is made out of hemicellulose and your coffee sweetener comes from wood products? We talk a lot about importing sawn wood, but we do not talk about all those other wood products that we use every day in our lives that are replacing plastic more and more. People see a tree as something that nature produces; they do not see that we are using it.

My huge concern is that there is polarisation now. It is being driven in Britain with this new drive for tree creation to create woodlands for biodiversity or carbon reduction reasons. We are not seeing that of course we can do that, but we can do more than that. More to the point, we need to do more than that. We cannot put our wood product needs over to other countries in the world and ship in all our paper, toilet rolls and plastic replication. We cannot do that, with other countries growing these trees for us.

If we create woodlands for one purpose in Britain, we are missing out on benefits and costing other developing countries. We are just putting the onus on them. That to me is a real concern. That is just because of ignorance of what wood and wood products do. We can do much more than that. Trees are wonderful things. Woodlands are wonderful things. They are multipurpose, so let us use them.

**Rosie Duffield:** Brilliant, thank you so much.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. It has been really good. David, just before we leave, you talk about the management of urban trees and a three-year grant to maintain them. I grow quite a lot of trees, and it is not until 10 years and onwards that you need to cut the branches back and start to do something to them. We really have to have something done about that. Unless you have planted a very big tree, you are not going to get that much growth in three years. This is something we really will ask Defra to look at.

Q127 **Dave Doogan:** I am struck by our witnesses today. It has been a challenge to the Committee about our understanding, and to a certain extent also the understanding of woodlands, tree production, tree products and tree care across society. I just wanted a very quick response from our witnesses about the roles of the respective forestry commissions around the United Kingdom and whether they are up to speed with the dynamic, modern world of forestry and woodland management that we have heard about over these last couple of hours.





Do they need to catch up?

**Shireen Chambers:** I worked with the Forestry Commission when it was a UK organisation before devolution. Its budgets have been cut necessarily, but it has suffered much the same as every other forestry organisation and company in a lack of qualified professionals being able to be employed in it. There are an awful lot of employees within each of the public sector departments who do not have a forestry background. That is to the detriment of the organisation, but that is not their fault. We simply do not have enough graduates coming out.

I do not think for one minute that they do not know the issues. There are still some extremely capable forestry professionals within the Forestry Commission in England, Scottish Forestry, and in Wales with Natural Resources Wales. There are extremely competent foresters there. We simply need more of them, and that is all there is.

**Jen Turner:** The Forestry Commission has been excellent all the way through. It was dealt with budget cuts wonderfully well considering how severe the budget cuts have been. Forest Research is absolutely at the top of its game, but it could always do more with more funding. It desperately needs that funding. It has loads of data that could really help us understand the implications of climate change for our trees, but it does not have the money to do anything with that data, which is so sad. Yes, I have so much respect for the Forestry Commission, Forestry England and Forest Research.

Q128 **Chair:** That is probably very good for us to hear, really. The point that Dave is making, and I probably share his concerns, is this: has the Forestry Commission moved into the brave new world of where we are planting trees, how we are planting trees, and the different purposes for which we are planting trees? Are you relatively confident that that is the case?

**Shireen Chambers:** I am extremely comfortable that that is the case. They have been probably making a lot of noise behind the scenes, which may not have even been heard. Yes, I would say I am very comfortable with that.

**Chair:** David, we will leave that on a positive note there. Can I think you all again very much? Can I also thank Andy from the secretariat for putting the questions and getting the two panels together? All of you have complemented each other very well. Shireen, Jen and David, thank you. You have also knitted in really well with the previous panel. You really have given us proper food for thought this afternoon and have given us a lot to put in our final report.

As I forgot to say to the last panel, if there is anything that you feel that you have forgotten to say while you were here, please let us have it in writing. We are delighted with your responses and answers to us today, so thank you very much.