

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Tree Planting and Woodlands, HC 356

Tuesday 14 September 2021

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[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 182 to 237

Witnesses

I: Judicaelle Hammond, Director of Policy and Advice, Country Land and Business Association (CLA); George Dunn, Chief Executive Officer, Tenant Farmers Association; Tom Bradshaw, Vice-President, National Farmers' Union.

II: Sir William Worsley, Chair, Forestry Commission; Steph Rhodes, Delivery Director, England Tree Planting Programme, Forestry Commission; Tony Juniper, Chair, Natural England; Alan Law, Chief Officer Strategy and Deputy Chief Executive, Natural England.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Tenant Farmers Association](#)
- [National Farmers' Union](#)
- [Forestry Commission](#)
- [Natural England](#)



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Judicaelle Hammond, George Dunn and Tom Bradshaw.

Q182 **Chair:** Welcome to the EFRA Select Committee. We are looking at tree planting today. First, we have Judicaelle from the CLA and George Dunn from the Tenant Farmers Association. Judicaelle, would you like to introduce yourself, then George, and then we will bring Tom Bradshaw in from the NFU virtually?

Judicaelle Hammond: I am Judicaelle Hammond. I am the director of policy and advice at the CLA. My team gives advice to our members and works with Government across a whole range of issues, including forestry and woodland.

Chair: It is nice of you to be here. It is good to have you here from the CLA.

George Dunn: My name is George Dunn. I am the chief executive of the Tenant Farmers Association of England and Wales, a role that I have held for nearly 25 years now, so man and boy you might say. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to appear before you and your Committee again, Chair.

Chair: It is always a pleasure to have you here, George.

Tom Bradshaw: I am Tom Bradshaw, NFU vice-president, representing 47,000 members across England and Wales.

Q183 **Chair:** Welcome, Tom. Like I said, we will try to make sure the virtual and physical works this afternoon. What is your overall assessment of the Government tree planting target? Is it ambitious enough?

Judicaelle Hammond: We need to start from what the Government wanted to achieve, which is tripling the amount of trees that are being planted every year, 7,000 hectares a year by the end of the Parliament in England. It is at the lower end of the Committee on Climate Change recommendation. However, given that we planted 2,300 hectares in 2019-20, it is going to be a massive endeavour. Our view is that, yes, it is ambitious.

On the other hand, we need to be quite wary of just focusing on tree planting. Important though that absolutely is, it is only part of successful afforestation. To an extent, the challenge is what comes after the trees are planted as much as tree plantation.

Is it achievable? That depends on a series of factors being aligned, including the perception of commercial risk. There are a number of things in the Government's programme that are very much welcome, including capital grants for planting, which are much better than they used to be, and some money for maintenance, which is really important. There are also things that we are unclear about. These are long term and will have



a big impact, such as the market for timber. At the moment, it is so far ahead it is, by its very nature, uncertain. The market for carbon is still in its infancy. Resources in Natural England and the Forestry Commission are needed to make that happen. I am sure you will want to explore that with the next panel.

We need a grant system that allows stacking of different public goods and sources of funding, including private sector, and of course the supply chain and skills. There are plenty of things to welcome in the Government programme, but also a number of uncertainties that will have an impact on achievability.

- Q184 **Chair:** You talked about carbon capture. In your view, will the schemes that Defra and the Government are putting forward be flexible enough also to allow carbon credits to be used on the same land? If you think about it, in the long term there will probably be more money coming in for carbon capture from the private sector than there is from the Government sector. What is your view on that?

Judicaelle Hammond: Our view is that they must be flexible enough to allow both carbon and other benefits, for the very reasons that you have just described. At the moment, for smaller areas, what is provided under the Woodland Carbon Code is too complex, which is putting some people off, because of the time and the amount of detail that you need to go through in order to get carbon credit in that way.

There is also a question about the price. Global pricing is quite low at the moment. There is, however, a real ambition and appetite in Government circles to make sure that both private and public money can be flowing into forestry. For us, that is absolutely right. That is something that Defra needs to take into account and make happen.

- Q185 **Chair:** George, from a tenant farmer point of view, are these schemes interesting enough? What concerns do you have over them?

George Dunn: In terms of the target that has been set, we view it as a bit of a stab in the dark. We do not really have any true understanding as to how that number came around, the 34,000 hectares, the 7,000 hectares a year. As Judicaelle rightly said, it is different to what the Committee on Climate Change was looking at.

We see a lack of strategy on the whole issue of what happens in rural areas going forward. Certainly the England woodland creation offer appears to be a little bit of a patchwork quilt of measures and initiatives that the Government are thinking about, in terms of SFI, landscape recovery, local nature recovery, the animal health and welfare pathway, and new entrants. We are not seeing a clear strategy as to where woodland fits within that. It is not just about how many but what trees, where and how they fit within the landscape.

Our principal concern is about how issues around resilience of the agricultural sector are to be handled, particularly for our members, who



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are quite often on short-term farm business tenancies and may have to forgo that land for it to go to tree planting. We think that the target is simply a stab in the dark. We cannot see how it fits with the strategy overall and we need to know a little bit more about that.

Q186 Chair: Because tree planting, by its very nature, is a long-term project, it is difficult with the tenanted sector. What can Government do more? Without actually changing the length of tenancy, it is difficult to allow tenants into particular schemes that might be of quite a lengthy time. Do you have any ideas on that?

George Dunn: In our evidence, we made some recommendations about the taxation framework within which landlords make decisions about letting land in order to try to provide longer-term opportunities for individuals. There certainly should be the opportunity for landlords and tenants to work together where possible to plant trees.

We do not want tenants to have carte blanche to plant trees whenever and wherever they like, right across land. That would have an impact on the ability of landlords to offer land into the tenanted sector, because they would be worried that it would be simply covered with trees. Field margins, wet areas, scrubby areas and shelterbelts are areas where I think the tenanted sector could play a part. We need to think about those in a better way.

Q187 Chair: Tom, I will bring you in now, not only about the target but I have a supplementary here for you as well. How should we ensure that the right trees are planted in the right place and that tree planting avoids using land we need to produce food? That is something quite close to my heart, as well as yours, I suspect.

Tom Bradshaw: On the target, we would like to see the evidence behind how they have got to that 30,000 hectare target. It is something that, at the moment, we are not absolutely clear about. There is also the science behind the carbon capture. There are a lot of people who tell you that, after the initial period of the woodland growth, the carbon sequestration from woodland is not as great as some other things. We need to see how that balances against potential soil sequestration from increasing organic matters, hedgerows, and trees in hedgerows and in the right place. There is clearly the desire to increase the woodland area, but we would like to see how that evidence all stacks up behind it.

On the tenanted side, we are hearing from our members in the tenanted sector that we are already seeing some landlords take land back in hand, rather than reletting it. The picture was painted earlier of no clear roadmap for how to move forward. Looking at these environmental schemes and tree planting schemes, there is an opportunity to secure the income for the future. It is putting great pressure on that tenanted sector at the moment. Longer-term tenancies are something we have all been asking for. At the moment, it is creating a really mixed picture out there,



and putting real pressure on some of those shorter-term tenancies and when tenancies come to an end.

Within our tree planting strategy, we are very clear that it is about the right tree in the right place and, I guess, making sure that farmers have a role in the design of schemes moving forward, as in where they want to plant those trees, on the area of farms where it may flood and where it is less productive. They are the areas where we would like to see woodland planting take place. We are slightly concerned at the moment. The lower limit for the size of a woodland is three hectares. Smaller areas than that, particularly for some of our smaller farming members, would be more appropriate. It could be reduced below that area to be more appropriate and work better.

Looking at woodland in the past, once you have created a woodland it is a permanent feature. We also put forward in our tree strategy that new woodlands could have some sort of carbon protection. It may be for a 25, 30 or 40-year period, but there is the opportunity that, at the end of it, once you have harvested that woodland and it has gone into building materials, it is not taken out of permanent land use change. If then there is the demand for food, we are able to utilise that land back in food production, rather than permanently into woodland.

Chair: Can we park that one there? That is very much going on to the second question. We will leave that there, and talk about the incentive and what have you then. I am going to bring Dave Doogan in now on the middle part of the first question. That talks about how well the devolved Administrations are doing.

Q188 Dave Doogan: It is really to knit the two parts of that question together. Your original question was about the ambition within the UK Government's English tree planting strategy. As you have said, Judicaelle, it is towards the bottom of that that was recommended and they are not managing that. We know that the 30,000 hectares is predicated largely on the efforts of devolved nations', particularly Scotland's, planting. Unfortunately for Defra, we can see within the United Kingdom what ambitious tree planting looks like, and it is nothing like what is happening here, in England. Is that a fair assessment?

Judicaelle Hammond: The circumstances are different, in terms of what the pressures on the land are. Population density is different across the border. There are areas that are more suitable for tree planting. There are more of them. I can understand the argument you are making. From our perspective, like the other two, it is quite difficult to see how the target was adopted. It is a question for Government really, whether the target is high enough and how they justify it, particularly compared to devolved Administrations. They would probably say that land pressures are different.

George Dunn: It is a factor of how much there is a lack of strategy within Defra around these things. Some of the devolved Administrations



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probably think about these things in a rather more strategic way, or have done to this point.

I would also say that we should not necessarily rush headlong into tree planting without considering the implications of that, as Tom and I have said, for the tenanted sector of agriculture. That is in terms of people losing land and making those businesses less resilient; displacing product and importing product, which may have a higher carbon base to it, so we are just exporting our carbon footprint elsewhere; and dealing with issues of biodiversity. I do not think it is healthy to focus on a massive target. We need to be thinking a bit more strategically about what trees, where those trees should be and how those trees fit into the wider strategy of Government.

Q189 Dave Doogan: Expanding on that, George, your concern is that we have some abstract target that does not marry up very well to operational realities within agriculture and horticulture. What about accepting that the maximum level of tree planting is the de facto target? How we get there, how we engage with industry, what type of land we use, what targets we set for harvesting, and implications for land use for food production thereafter, are all peripheral, very important contributory factors. They do not necessarily feed into a target.

George Dunn: I disagree entirely. You need to think about those things strategically because, when you squeeze the bubble at one end, it will come up somewhere else. If you are trying to chase carbon as your issue and you end up planting on soils that are already doing a lot for carbon, when you are displacing livestock that is already being produced to very efficient carbon standards and importing stuff from abroad, do you meet your carbon standards? You do not. You need to be thinking about these things from the word "go". They are not peripheral; they are central to the concern.

Q190 Chair: Tom, would you like to make a comment? It is an interesting point there that George made at that stage. I am inclined to agree with George on that one. Livestock and permanent pasture holds an awful lot of carbon in the soil. We have to be careful we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. I should not lead you as a witness. Would you like to say something?

Tom Bradshaw: We know the carbon footprint of our beef production in the UK is 50% lower than the global average. We do not want to simply displace production from the UK to rely on higher imports and export our carbon footprint overseas.

On the devolved bit of the question, this is an issue right the way across agricultural policy development at the moment. We are very likely to see differing policies in different countries within the United Kingdom. That is either going to create competitive advantages or disadvantages, depending on where you sit within an island. It is a complication that exists at the moment to some degree, but it seems like it could be



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extenuated as we move forward. We have real concerns about the differing paths that different nations are taking within the United Kingdom. That is probably a challenge that we need to look at in greater detail to try to make sure that the policies that are developed are compatible and work together.

Q191 **Chair:** I suppose the argument is that the devolved nations have actually set a specific target for tree planting. I suppose the argument is as to whether England should necessarily do the same. What would be your take on that?

Tom Bradshaw: We are not against having targets, provided they are backed up with the evidence base. That is the challenge. We do not want to remove an industry, or remove part of the food production element of the industry, which is already involved in the sequestering of carbon, and simply export that. We would be very nervous of that.

I was on an upland farm last week and they were saying that having shelterbelts could be a part of the solution. It is not rewilding of the upland. It is not planting the whole of the upland, but, if they could have a shelterbelt running up the hill, that would be beneficial for them. We need to look at the options that are appropriate for the individual situation.

Chair: Sometimes we lose the biodiversity with having some small pockets of trees and what they do for the landscape as well. That is where the smart tree planting comes in. We will discuss that further as we go along.

Q192 **Mrs Murray:** Hello. I am going to go to Judicaelle first and then George, mainly because you have answered some of this question already, Tom. Then I will come to you for you to fill in anything extra you want to add. In the short term, does the England woodland creation offer provide farmers and landowners with the right incentives to start planting more trees?

Judicaelle Hammond: As I started saying earlier, the offer is much more attractive than what we have had before. That is something that we very much welcome. Also, the supplements for additional outcomes, such as access, biodiversity et cetera, are really useful. There is a question of whether, as we move from the England woodland creation offer, which is part of the nature for climate fund, into the environmental land management scheme, the budget is going to be sufficient, given that we are looking at other calls on that budget, in terms of public payment for public goods and industry productivity. The 25-year environment plan ambitions are very extensive already. The worry that the CLA has is whether the Government will give themselves the means to deliver their ambitions in the long term.

There are a number of issues about the current scheme, including management support, which stops after the first 10 years. While it is



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really useful, because it is in the first 10 years that most of the work is needed and therefore the cost incurred, in terms of making sure the trees you plant survive, it does not stop there. In particular, you then have another 10 years, potentially without any commercial income from that woodland at all, particularly if you then have not had the opportunity to enter a carbon market, for example. As a farmer or a land manager, you would be asked to forgo an income that is annual from farming for something that might happen in the future, with a 10-year gap, where you are still going to be incurring cost of management. That is one of the elements where the current offer falls down.

There are also issues, which I am sure we will be talking about later, about what I call "once a tree, always a tree". That is your permanence that my two colleagues have already raised. That is an issue, in terms of making the jump.

In terms of small-scale planting, shelterbelts and planting trees in hedges, that is probably less of an issue. If you are looking at larger-scale planting, and it does not have to be that much larger, it definitely becomes an issue. There are still big areas of Government policy that have not yet been addressed, which would have an impact.

George Dunn: In relation to the incentives, your question could be more aptly put: "Is it suitable for owner-occupier farmers and landowners?" As Judicaelle has said, it is probably the most lucrative grant scheme for woodland planting that we have had. Realistically, it is not going to get more lucrative. To that end, it is quite an incentive. As Tom has said, it is already encouraging some landlords not to offer land back to tenants on farm business tenancies for the resilience of their businesses.

If I was to answer your question in respect of whether it is sufficient for the tenanted sector of agriculture, I would say there is a long way to go. For instance, what Tom talked about in terms of scale of planting is an issue. If we want to do, as I said in my earlier answer, scrub areas, field corners, field edges, we need to make sure that can be built into the scheme.

For those tenant farmers who are occupying under the old-style Agricultural Holdings Act tenancies, they will at least have the protection of the Agriculture Act, in terms of being able to object to a landlord's unreasonable refusal to allow them into a scheme. We have to see how that plays out. The regulations have not long been brought forward for that.

For farm business tenancies, it is really difficult, particularly due to short length of term and restrictive terms. We do not foresee many FBT tenants being able to access this scheme at all. In fact, as Tom rightly said, we foresee many FBT tenants losing their land to landlords who want to take those lucrative schemes and think about carbon credits and biodiversity net gain on top of that. For the tenanted sector, there are still a lot of questions to be answered, we think.



Mrs Murray: Tom, do you have anything to add?

Tom Bradshaw: I would back up what has been said. The payment rates, the grant rates, are much better than they have been. We very much welcome that. The ability for stackable finance within there is also very welcome. We have been pretty clear throughout the development of the agricultural schemes, and I would say the same about this one, that we must be able to bring the private capital market into this.

It is the public-private, where it meets and which elements, particularly the carbon elements. How accessible is it going to be for the trading of the carbon in the future when it has been permitted under the grant in the first place? There have always been these double funding worries, which with woodland have generally been overcome actually. We must be able to look at that co-financing model where public meets private. That will be critical to the future success.

Also, we must not take our eye off the fact that we import a lot of timber. Provided we are buying the right timber, there may be commercial opportunities for this in the future as well.

Q193 **Mrs Murray:** I will stay with you, Tom, for the next part of my question. What is your assessment of how effective ELMS will be at increasing tree planting in the UK? Will it make it economically viable for farmers and landowners to create and manage woodland?

Tom Bradshaw: What we are seeing of ELMS at the moment is not directly related to woodland creation. If I was being critical of ELMS at the moment, a lot of our members are really going to struggle with the fact that there are some quite big incentives for planting of woodland, but the management of existing woodland falls woefully short of the cost of managing that woodland. There is a lot of woodland that has not been actively managed. If this is for biodiversity delivery and net gain, management of that woodland could add significantly to the environmental delivery. At the moment, it is nearly falling out of scope.

There is a very mixed picture when the payment rates under the pilot—and I cannot remember exactly what they are—are very low. That is to the point that there is not a big enough incentive to put the woodland into the scheme, yet you could get these grants for woodland creation under the England woodland creation offer. It seems a bit of a mixed policy and not necessarily joined up in the approach. We really would encourage the farm woodland to be receiving greater payments for active management.

Q194 **Mrs Murray:** Quickly, before I move on to our other witnesses with that question and this one I am going to ask now, given the lack of clarity around ELMS, what are your members' key priorities for inclusion within it?

Tom Bradshaw: What they absolutely want is clarity. That is the message we have been delivering for quite a long while now. It is still



such an opaque picture as to what the future funding schemes are going to look like. I have mentioned the farm woodland and it is really important that the farm woodland is recognised. That is difficult within the tenanted sector because very often they are excluded from tenancies. It is something that we feel should be recognised.

We believe that we can deliver net zero through improving productivity and where we underpin sustainable food production through the delivery of a holistic ELM scheme. It should not be about woodland or food production. It should be about making sure we are delivering what society requires and in the right balance.

If there was one overall ask, it would be about the strategic plan for the future of countryside management and food production in the UK. We have quite a lot of bitty policy development at the moment. I would even go as far as saying it has been developed in silos to a degree. There does not seem to be an overarching ambition to say, "This is what we want from UK farming and food production". Woodland at the same time can all be part of that vision and strategy for what we need to deliver. That is probably what is lacking at the moment.

George Dunn: Tom has echoed quite a lot of what I said about the lack of strategic oversight, in terms of how this policy fits within the wider countryside management issues. I think back to the wake of the EU referendum, and the great degree of interest there was in doing things differently and having our hands back on the levers of power, in terms of policy domestically. There was the aspiration to do things differently, to take things strategically, in an outcome-focused way. Then we had *Health and Harmony* three and a bit years ago, which again was all about that.

Over time, we have seen a move away from that aspiration. We tend to be going back to the old playbooks that we had when we were members of the European Union, in terms of income forgone, looking at very siloed schemes and, as I said earlier, a bit of a patchwork quilt. It is very difficult to see how ELM in its current form is going to change that for England.

We are currently in the pilot phase of the first bit of ELM, which is the sustainable farming incentive. It is a struggle to get people to sign up to that, mainly because Defra is not providing sufficient answers to questions that are being raised about access to that scheme. We are in the hundreds of individuals who are currently signed up to that. We have not even thought about piloting the local nature recovery or landscape recovery scheme. It will be a long time, to my mind, before we see ELM becoming what we thought it was going to be, this brand new, strategic, public payments for public goods, outcome-focused platform.

Heaven knows where woodland planting fits within that. As we have said, it seems to have been created in its own silo. In so many discussions that we have had with Defra officials on the England woodland creation offer,



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there has been very little dialogue with the other bits of Defra as to how that fits. There is a real worry of lack of strategy.

Judicaelle Hammond: I am going to start by echoing what George has just said, in terms of how the England woodland creation offer fits within ELM, which is a concern for us as well. In terms of the key priorities, echoing what others have said, there is a real lack of clarity in terms of what the overall picture is. The principles are clear, but there is no roadmap yet. For businesses that need seven to 10-year planning horizons, it is really difficult. We know the bad news; that is the reduction in BPS. We do not know what is coming next and when.

In terms of the way the scheme is put together, echoing what George was saying about it being a patchwork, that is absolutely right. For us, that is the sign of it being seen as the solution to everything, which is worrying. It was always going to be very ambitious and it was going to be moving us away from the old playbook, although, as George was saying, some elements of that seem to be difficult to move away from.

At the moment, another issue that people have not yet mentioned is that there is no sense of how the guarantee that Michael Gove gave when he was Secretary of State in Defra, that people who go into an ELM scheme are not disadvantaged compared to the current scheme, is going to work. There are plenty of issues that are not yet resolved.

Q195 **Rosie Duffield:** Judicaelle and Tom, you have both said that the approvals process for tree planting and woodland needs to be made much less complicated. Can you expand on this a little bit and explain how it could be improved in both of your views please?

Tom Bradshaw: From what I understand of the England woodland creation offer, the application and approval process you have to go through, you have to undertake wildlife surveys and things before you can be accepted into the scheme, to make sure there is nothing already on the site. That can be a very longwinded process. It could be simplified from that perspective.

For us, the greater worry is where it sits. The conversation we have just had is where it sits with the other schemes, the local nature recovery, the landscape recovery. We recognise it will not be involved with the sustainable farming incentive. That might be for odd tree planting, rather than areas of trees, but, for us, it is about that picture of where it all fits together. That creates more confusion at the moment when you are looking at what is, on the face of it, quite a good offer in the England woodland creation offer.

You have probably heard that we have been quite positive about the improved payment rates and the maintenance over the first 10 years, which used not to be part of the payment plan. That is welcomed. We need to understand where that fits with the other schemes and how it all fits together.



Judicaelle Hammond: We have been doing some more thinking since we put in our written evidence to the Committee. In the submission, we talked about thresholds for the environmental impact assessment regulations. We have moved away from that thinking. We have realised, talking to more members as the England trees action plan was published and then EWCO came on, that actually thresholds are not so much of an issue as timing and costs.

These regulations have strict controls for very good reasons, but they involve consultation on a number of strands. One of the ways we could streamline the process is to run those consultations concurrently, rather than sequentially, which is how they are being run at the moment. That would have an impact on the overall timetable between the start and the end, when you are getting approval.

The second thing that would be useful, in terms of improvement, is a clear and realistic timetable from the Forestry Commission, again from start to finish, including realistic and well-publicised timing for submitting objections and for getting a decision from the Forestry Commission. In terms of process improvement, that definitely would be helpful.

The third one, for which I do not yet have a solution, unfortunately, but I can see the beginning of an opportunity, is that demonstrating compliance with the UK forestry standard takes months and requires professional help just to get a grant, just to get started. The reason why I am saying I am not giving a solution to you is that there is a positive to this. The compliance should allay fears that lead to objections. We can see that the mechanism is really useful, but there is a question around going under the bonnet, if you like. Are there things that can be improved, in terms of timing, the requirements or other things? We do not yet have a particular view on that.

Q196 **Rosie Duffield:** That leads quite nicely into the next question. What kind of advice and support do farmers and landowners need to help them better navigate the approvals process? It sounds as though communication is a big one and timings being published better. We have heard before that there is not a lot of publicity on these kinds of deadlines for things. Is that something you would like to stress again to Defra?

Judicaelle Hammond: Yes, definitely. In terms of guidance, it could and should be consolidated and rationalised, but I understand that is already in train. We very much welcome that, because it is a maze. We think that there is a real need for what we loosely call outreach to be integrated with the EWCO and, indeed, the woodland part of the sustainable farming incentive. This was a result of the ELM test and trial that the CLA ran. It showed very clearly that people would like the information to come to them in a much more accessible, understandable and focused way.

Tom Bradshaw: Our members are facing the biggest change in agricultural support that they will have faced in their lifetimes. It is all



well and good having the woodland creation offer in one place, but it is this clear, coherent vision of where they are heading. It is that element that is creating a lot of confusion, because there is a lack of information. If they could have the roadmap, so they could see what the options are, they might well choose to go down this road. For some members, this might be the right decision.

It is very difficult to know if it is the right decision when you do not know where the other roads are taking you. That is the overarching theme we are hearing: "We are going to get on and produce at the moment, and we will wait and see what is going to happen, what is coming down the road, because we do not know what it is". If we want to promote woodland, it is about making sure it is all set out so that the options are there and members can decide, "Yes, I want to create three hectares of woodland over there, or five hectares over there, because that fits for me, my family and my business". At the moment, they do not have that roadmap.

George Dunn: I wanted to take a slightly different view on the answers that you have had to date. The background to the answers and the question is that we need as much flexibility as possible for this tree planting. We need to remember not to recreate the mistakes of the past. We are talking about major, landscape-scale land use change here. We are offering an incentive to all comers to apply for this and go and plant trees when they come into this scheme.

If you remember what happened when we had the renewable energy incentives, we had solar everywhere. Then we had maize grown in inappropriate places for AD plants, causing problems in terms of supply of land into the tenanted sector. There needs to be a robust approvals process, because we do not want to recreate those problems of the past.

Equally, you could have a differential approach. Some of the schemes we were talking about earlier, the shelterbelts, the field areas, the field corners, could be on a much reduced approval basis process, because they are less intrusive in the landscape. In our view, the broad acre planting would need to have sufficient scrutiny to make sure that the strategic objectives you are trying to achieve are achieved and you are not creating unintended consequences.

Q197 **Rosie Duffield:** There is one final part to this question. Do the Forestry Commission and Natural England have enough resources and capacity to deal with the tree planting applications, in your view? Do you think they are being a bit overwhelmed?

Judicaelle Hammond: It is likely that they are going to be, yes. You will have plenty of opportunity to ask the second panel I am sure, but that is definitely a fear that our members have. Natural England is already very stretched. We know that the Forestry Commission was requesting an increase in its resources from Government. That is absolutely right, given the scale at hand. That is a really big issue.



George Dunn: The other organisation to bring into that mix is the Rural Payments Agency, because it has been working with Defra on the delivery of the England woodland creation offer. Obviously there is a lot on the RPA's plate in terms of delivering across this portfolio. The RPA would be another body to ask the question of.

Tom Bradshaw: It is really important that Natural England and the Forestry Commission are completely aligned in what it is that they want to see delivered. I hear of examples where that alignment may not have happened. To streamline the process and make it work, everyone needs to be singing from the same hymn sheet in what that delivery will look like and how it will be delivered.

Q198 **Derek Thomas:** Tom, I am going to go back to the point you began to make right at the very beginning, if that is all right. To what extent are permanent land use change rules disincentivising landowners and farmers who might be willing to create woodland. You drifted into that and I wanted to bring you back on that. As you say, if you lock up land in perpetuity, how that is helping the farmer, or is that a disincentive?

Tom Bradshaw: It will always be a concern if, by planting a woodland, that means that that land has to be permanently turned over to woodland. A lot of people will be growing this as a harvestable woodland, so it will be utilised in building, because then the carbon is stored permanently. If you end up using it for woodchip or things like that, ultimately the carbon ends up being released, so it does not have the same long-term carbon storing capacity.

If there were the opportunity to create a category of a carbon storage woodland, which meant that you were not turning the land over in perpetuity, it would give members more flexibility should the demand for food rise. We have to remember that, when you look at climate change modelling, the UK is going to have a very variable climate, but, because of our temperate climate, we will be a great place for producing food for the future. If we see that land all tied up with woodland when actually we think we need to be producing, for ourselves and others, we would like to have that ability. It would be in the interests of the country to have that ability, for it not to be tied up in perpetuity.

I think it will be a disincentive. It is too early to say how big an issue that is. It is certainly something where, if you could bring that in to start off with, it would help ease that problem.

Q199 **Derek Thomas:** That is helpful. George or Judicaelle, do you have anything to add to that? I want to move on. While you are thinking about that, there is a second part of the question, which Tom may want to come back in on, but he has already touched on it. Evidence to our inquiry has argued for more flexibility on permanent land use change rules. How would this work in practice? Tom has given one example of how it would work in practice. Do you have other ideas about how you could make sure that the incentive is there for farmers to put land over to



tree planting?

George Dunn: The ability for landlords and tenants to navigate through this scheme is made a lot more complicated by the fact that we are looking at a permanent land use change. The ability for landlords and tenants to come to an agreement to that end is much diminished because of that.

We already have situations where trees have been planted and the felling licences requirements will require those trees to be replaced like for like. There are some areas where we have put trees in the wrong place for the wrong reason. Do we really want to perpetuate that?

Tom has come forward with the idea of having time period within which you commit to have these trees. While there might be a reasonable expectation that they are going to remain in place, there will be a potential for review of that at some point in the future, subject to the way in which these things can work strategically, if that carbon in that woodland is replaced by carbon in another woodland, et cetera. There are ways in which you can look at time-limited commitments, so that people are not looking at, necessarily, land being held in perpetuity in woodland.

Judicaelle Hammond: Permanence is a real conundrum. For small-scale planting and agroforestry, there is a question of whether we should have an exemption from permanence requirements. We certainly agree with the TFA that it should not be made hard to correct decisions or adapt again because of climate change, different species, land no longer being suitable, tree health problems or, indeed, the land being needed for food production again.

Say, for example, you are planting on a small farm at the moment and you are required to find a different location for those trees, if the farm is small you might actually struggle to do that. The last thing you want is nugatory expense on something that does not work. That is really important.

I would like to make a point about the difficulties for landlords and tenants. We have seen schemes in the past, including the woodland grant scheme and the farm woodland premium scheme, where they were quite generous and we did not see a sizeable move to displace tenants, even when the payment exceeded the rental income. Landowners will be, like all farmers, very wary and very cautious because of the permanence issue and the move towards uncertain income. They will want to come at it from the perspective of collaboration with tenants and keeping good tenants.

We have had very recent meetings with a group of landowners, which are charities, utilities and educational establishments. No one in that group was going down the route of taking farming back in hand, largely because they are not into farming in hand anyway, so they need tenants. They were looking at planting through collaboration, changes in agreement et



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cetera. We also had a meeting with a major land agent yesterday. It was not seeing any movement either, for all the reasons that are making farmers generally very nervous about woodland planting.

Q200 Derek Thomas: You may have drifted into the next question—but it is not my question, so it is not my problem.

Tom, can I come back to you briefly if you want to say anything on that last point? Also, I am the West Cornwall MP and there are massive parts of my countryside that were always woodland and we chopped them down to prop our tin mines up. It is not very good for much more than grazing and ground-nesting birds. Is this discussion a little bit unnecessary? Would it be better just to have a proper strategy that identifies the land that is not great for food crops and is unlikely to be needed in the future for feeding the nation and beyond?

Tom Bradshaw: Determining where trees are planted and telling landowners that trees will be planted on their farms is going to be very unpopular. That is something that we simply could not support, to end up with a tree planting strategy that is going to be implemented regardless of land ownership, land structure or farm type. Working with the industry and making sure that members and farmers are part of the design is always going to be the best way to get buy-in.

The question I would ask is whether we are confident that planting that land to trees will store more carbon than the grassland that is being grazed there at the moment. There are still big question marks about that in some of the work I have seen. If that evidence is undisputable, clearly, when we look to carbon payments in the future, there will be commercial reasons to make sure you have woodland on that land, where it can provide a greater return than by producing food crops.

That is where we would like to get to, where it is the choice of the farmer; the opportunities or options are put in front of them; and they turn round and say, "The best option for me is to take the carbon credit, to take the woodland creation grant, and to plant woodland". That would be a win for everybody if that is genuinely the best option.

Derek Thomas: You are right: the jury is still out on that.

Q201 Julian Sturdy: I would like to come in very quickly on Derek's last point. I suppose Tom first and maybe George might want to comment on this. Is it possible to maybe rule out certain types of land and say that certain types of grades of land are not suitable for tree planting because they are too valuable as part of the food production in this country?

Tom Bradshaw: I guess immediately we would think of our grade 1 soils, which are producing the bulk of our vegetable crops. I also know that we have members who are looking at agroforestry on some of those grade 1 soils. That does not take vast areas out of production, but they would say it enhances their productivity. They are producing alleys with fruit crops alongside crops.



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We should be very cautious about taking out our primary food production resource on those best soil types, but we have to make sure that we are not dictating to people. The biggest question I would ask here is what the signals from Government are. Is it that we want food production, or is it that we are more interested in biodiversity and carbon? If we are being told that biodiversity and carbon is more important than food production, that creates problems, does it not?

It goes back to the overall strategy of what it is that we want to deliver for our countryside, our food production, our farmers, our members, and what strategy is in place. I always believe that our best soils should be able to provide the greatest return by providing the food that we eat day to day. If that is not the case, we have some real challenges ahead.

George Dunn: Absolute prohibitions are not necessarily very easy to navigate yourself around. It depends on what nature of tree planting you are talking about. We talked about some small-scale schemes, so you could still have shelterbelts, scrubby areas, field corners and field margins with tree planting, but maintain your productive agricultural land at its heart.

I do not think we want particular prohibitions, but we certainly want there to be a strategic overview, rather than just saying, "All comers, apply for this grant and plant what you like". That is not what we foresee as a good strategy.

Q202 **Robbie Moore:** I am going to focus some of my questions on farm tenancies, so to George, if you would not mind coming in first. To what extent do you think farm tenancies, in the broadest of terms, are a barrier to tenants being able to plant trees and increase tree planting production?

George Dunn: You will have to stop me from going on for the rest of the evening, because obviously I could.

Chair: Do not worry; I will stop you, George.

George Dunn: Thank you, Chair. I would disagree with Judicaelle here. We are in a moment of great change within the tenanted sector of agriculture. I say that because, as we have rightly pointed out, we are losing the basic payment scheme payments. They are coming down so that everybody will lose at least half by 2024. In another three or four years, they will be gone completely.

Defra is talking about the extent to which that should reduce rents in the sector and make businesses more resilient, but of course landlords have other options. They have the England woodland creation offer. They have biodiversity net gain on the horizon. They have carbon capture and all that. Landlords are looking at how they can maximise their revenue into the long term by taking some of these other offerings. That is why they continue to let land short and to offer such short-term tenancies on farm



business tenancies. We think that there is a move at the moment among the landlord community and the agents who are advising them to keep things short, in order to look for those opportunities to take land out of agriculture for tree planting and other schemes.

For the AHA tenants who are keen to go down the route of planting trees and want to take up the offer, so long as it can be geared towards the sorts of planting schemes we think they should be able to take part in, as we said in our earlier evidence, at least they will have a facility to have an argument with the landlord if they unreasonably refuse their access to those schemes. For those who are on farm business tenancies, we really worry that they will be disenfranchised from accessing this money at all. We are even more worried about, as I have said, them losing land.

That is why we have come forward with the idea that landlords should not be able to have access to public money for tree planting schemes if they have got rid of a tenant on a farm tenancy previously. There should be a year's gap before they should be able to apply for that funding, not that they should be excluded completely, but to provide a bit of leverage for the landlord and the tenant to maybe negotiate something, rather than the land lying in a quarantine period for a year.

There are already good examples of that elsewhere. The class Q permitted development rights that allow farm buildings to be turned into residential units can go forward only if the sitting tenant or the previous tenant has consented to that. In terms of the overall strategy of ensuring resilient farm businesses, that there are good discussions between landlords and tenants, and that this is done in a strategic way, we think that quarantine period should be introduced.

Defra has said to us that it thinks there are sufficient safeguards in place to stop that from occurring already. I do not know what they are yet and I have asked the question of Defra, what those safeguards are. We need to make sure that tenants are not disenfranchised from taking part and that they are not scapegoated in this by losing land to a scheme that will make them less resilient into the long term.

Q203 Robbie Moore: I think the statistic is that just over 30% of land in England is ringfenced for the tenanted sector. If tenants had access to all the schemes that are available to landowners at the moment, how much more tree planting do you think would be able to be achieved?

George Dunn: It is very difficult to say. How long is a piece of string? In the sense that our members are looking already at losing a considerable slice of money from the basic payment scheme, they are keen and in the marketplace to find ways of recouping that for their businesses going forward. As the tree planting element is one of those elements, it is going to be one of the things our members would look at if they had access to it. It could be considerable.

Q204 Robbie Moore: In the written evidence that you provided the



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Committee, you focused on some incentivisations down the tax route, looking at APR for example. If you look at a farm business tenancy average length, it is maybe just over three years for bare land and maybe just under 10 for an equipped holding. One of your suggestions is having APR existing only for those tenancies that are over 10 years in length. Just expand on that quickly, George, in terms of how that would help some of the longer-term planning for trying to achieve the tree planting.

George Dunn: There are two elements to our proposal here. The first is that the generous agricultural property relief that is available to landlords, regardless of how long they let for, which—let us face it—is a big state subsidy to the landlord sector, should be receivable by the landlord in return for a public good. Longer-term occupation of land unlocks a lot of public good, in terms of tree planting and other aspects, access to ELM et cetera.

We also think that the landlord should be able to lock in their capital taxation position on day one of the lease, so that they know it will never change. For as long as that lease is in place, it will never change, so they can be de-risked, should any subsequent Chancellor of the Exchequer decide to tax land differently, if they are able to lock in on day one, so we can have longer-term agreements.

I could point you to the national food strategy, which Henry Dimbleby has written. We are already forgetting about it, given that lots of other things have been in the mix in the news. In that report, they bothered to take a strategic view of this particular issue and have recommended to Government that this is something they should take forward. It is not just something we are proposing. People who have looked at this at a strategic level in the wider strategy have said that this is a good thing to do.

Q205 **Robbie Moore:** I would be keen to explore a little more about the joint initiative both the TFA and the CLA are exploring as well, in terms of creating more flexibility for landowners and tenants being able to access some of the initiatives that are coming out for tree planting. I do not know if you just want to expand on that.

George Dunn: We have been having discussions about guidance to issue to our members jointly about how to approach these types of arrangements. I have to say we have reached a bit of a hiatus in that. Judicaelle can obviously speak for the CLA on this, but the CLA's position is that it does not want the guidance to be relevant when there is a dispute, whereas we believe the best time you need guidance is when you are in dispute.

To rule it out as being irrelevant in a dispute situation seems to us to be wrong, and we could not sign up to guidance that said, "This does not apply if you are in dispute", because you need to know who is being reasonable and unreasonable in that dispute. Let us hope that we can get



over that particular issue, because there are lots of things that we can do together to encourage our members on this front.

Q206 Robbie Moore: The TFA has been very good in putting forward a lot of recommendations to deal with creating more certainty for the tenanted sector, but also potentially for landowners, when we are trying to set these goals for tree planting as well as for food production.

Other than the tax change, is there anything else you want to specifically highlight that may help with getting the tree planting strategy in place? I am just thinking that in some of the written evidence you provided you made comments to wanting HMRC to clamp down on some of the share farming/contract farming type arrangements that are mainly put in place through being ill-advised on what the actual aspirations are. I do not know if you want to comment on how that may help or hinder.

George Dunn: Sure. It is within the tax remit. If you look at the extent to which we have a situation where people are using things like share farming/contract farming, grazing licences or cropping licences to avoid paying tax, we think that HMRC needs to be taking more of a gimlet eye to stop people using those as sham arrangements.

Also there is the issue of the treatment of income tax. If you look at what has been happening in Ireland and the availability of income tax incentives to landlords, it has created a tenanted sector out of nothing in the south of Ireland. We could tailor that to what we want in the UK for longer-term leases going forward. There is a lot that we can do in this space to encourage those longer-term interests in land.

Q207 Robbie Moore: Judicaelle, do you mind coming in on the question I was just asking about the joint initiative that was being, and I assume still is being, explored between you and the TFA?

Judicaelle Hammond: Yes, it is still being explored. I think that there is a different understanding of what the guidance was for. I think it started through William Worsley when he was still the tree tsar, setting us the challenge: "Okay, so the scheme is not yet there. If you wanted to have without prejudice conversations between tenants and landlords, what do you and the TFA think would need to happen?" We went down that path and it has been really helpful to have that exchange of views.

I think we are very nearly there, but at the end of the day it would not be right for trade associations to design something that is then binding what is a contractual relationship under contract law, given that we are not party to those relationships. It is very much still on the table, and I am hoping we will be able to agree on it, but it is guidance. There is a code of practice already under the Tenancy Reform Industry Group. That was very recently revised to deal with varying issues, and that will include trees. Let us use that for its proper purpose. There are a variety of legislative protections already in place anyway.



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In terms of the other ideas that George put forward, HMRC taking a gimlet eye to share farming arrangements we certainly would not disagree with, and we know that it is already doing that. That is definitely sensible and is already happening. In terms of tax, it would run the risk of restricting what is already a tight market further. Actually, it might make it more difficult for George's members.

I should correct the impression that the agricultural business relief is a subsidy. It was there for a very good reason, which is to make sure that family businesses are not hit by a massive cashflow issue upon death. That is something we need to remember, because it is lost in the mists of time. It is important that short-term tenancies are available because they offer flexibility for everyone. It is right that there is a mixed economy out there, and that is something that we will continue to see. There will be people—both landowners and tenants—who are not interested in tree planting and some who are. It is quite right to allow that mixed economy.

Trees are different to, say, biodiversity net gain, the sustainable farming incentive, et cetera, because they are permanent and irreversible. Basically you need somebody's consent to make a change to their asset that cannot be unwound. That is fundamental in property rights, and that is where we need to recognise there needs to be respect on both sides and a recognition of that particular issue.

George Dunn: Can I just say that we have never wanted the guidance to be compulsory or binding on any party? We simply could not sign up to guidance that said it had no relevance in a dispute, because you need to understand who is being reasonable and who is being unreasonable when you are in dispute, and the guidance could usefully speak to that.

On the APR point, I take Judicaelle's point about farm businesses and those businesses being able to be handed on without a massive tax hit. We are not talking about farm businesses here; we are talking about assets in the hands of landlords. The reason why APR was equalised in 1995 was to equalise the treatment of land that was in hand and land that was let, so there was no disincentive to letting. We were promised we would get longer-term tenancies as a result of that. We have not.

Robbie Moore: From my own knowledge, it has actually gone in the reverse. Thank you both very much.

Chair: Those were very detailed questions and some very good answers, thank you, and good for the record. It is interesting; you are on the same page, but you have some differences. That came over quite clearly, and you both argued in a very civilised way, if I may say so.

It is probably time we brought Tom back in. He has gone to sleep now. You have not gone to sleep, Tom; do not worry, but I am conscious that you were not brought into the last question.

Q208 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you to all our witnesses for being with us today. Tom,



you will be pleased to hear I will come to you first on this one. This is probably the quick-fire round as we are coming to the end. Some of my questions we have already covered in previous questions, but I wanted to talk about some of the barriers to potential tree planting. We have heard in our inquiry that some farmers may be resistant to tree planting because they do not want to become foresters, but also that they may actually be more open to doing so if the right financial measures and incentives are in place. What do you think about that question, Tom?

Tom Bradshaw: Two of the biggest barriers are permanency, which we have talked about, and scale, which we have also talked about. Under countryside stewardship, it was three hectares of woodland; under the woodland grant scheme, it is now a hectare. If we are looking at scrubby corners or inefficient field corners, which could be only 0.3 or 0.4 of a hectare, does there need to be a lower limit? That would be the question. That is something: you may well find more smaller pockets of woodland planted if there was more flexibility around the lower limit.

Some will say, “We are food producers and that is what we want to do. We do not want to plant woodland”. Beyond that, it will be about the economic case for planting woodland and that is where the ability to stack these public and private goods is going to be really important, as we move forward, to maximise the value from the woodland. Biodiversity net gain and carbon offsetting are opportunities that can be created within the woodland, which we need to make sure we can utilise. The stacking of incentives, as well as allowing the private money to come into that stacking, is really important.

Finally for me, it is about the clear strategy, making sure that the options are clearly laid out and available for our members to decipher and work out which path they want to go down. It is critical to get that laid out in a simple format.

Q209 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you. That is really helpful. I come back to the Chair’s earlier question to you about the right trees in the right place, in terms of encouraging farmers and landowners along those lines, given the benefits to farmers, landowners and local communities. In my part of the world, in Cumbria, flood mitigation is a key concept that people want to try and buy into. If that becomes much more upfront, do you think that will be a way of people buying into these tree planting schemes—yes, for biodiversity, yes, for carbon capture, but also for protecting communities from flooding?

Tom Bradshaw: Again, I absolutely agree with you that there is definitely a role there. There is also an education piece here. It is easy for me to sit here and talk about the right tree in the right place, but I am not sure I would know what the right tree is in the right place. I think there is a critical education role to make sure that we, as farmers and as landowners, are in a position where we can make those decisions, in conjunction with advisers, the Forestry Commission, Natural England and



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whoever else it may be. There is a job to do here so that we can all learn together and understand whether we are delivering the right things.

Dr Hudson: Can I throw those questions maybe to Judicaelle first?

Judicaelle Hammond: Skills and expertise, as Tom was saying, is critical and I do not think that there is a lot of that around yet. As I was saying earlier, outreach by the Forestry Commission, which has the skills and experience, is seriously helpful. Peer learning from people who have been doing forestry, even on a small scale, to demystify to some extent, but also share knowledge and experience, would be helpful.

Flood management, interestingly, is one of the most oft-quoted reasons why some of our members are looking at afforestation, so that is definitely something that they are very much looking at and is live, so to speak. There are other barriers that we have not yet touched on. One is land devaluation. At the moment, if you are planting trees, you are looking at a significant land devaluation in the short and in the long term. That is linked to permanence as well. There are tax implications, which we have not touched on, on treatment of public good delivery generally, which I think Defra has not yet thought about.

The main one is the loss of annual income, the uncertainty. Is there going to be a market for that tree in 25 years, when you take the first thinning, or 30, 40 or 50 years, or more if it is a broadleaf? What are those trees going to be for and how are they going to pay for themselves, compared to an income that, despite the loss of BPS on farming, you now have to plan for? There are other things like biodiversity net gain, et cetera, but trees are a really big culture change. It is uncharted territory for many farmers, so I would not expect everybody to just rush for it. I do not think it is going to happen.

Q210 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you. That is really helpful. I will throw those questions to you, George. I will add a little supplementary for you as well. Do you feel that agroforestry may provide a viable model for getting more tenant farmers or farmers in general into planting trees? What are the barriers, and then what can be done to try and get more folk to do it for the collective good, effectively?

George Dunn: Around some of the cultural issues that you were talking about, we have to look at the messaging here that our members are hearing. They are hearing, "Bovines are bad; trees are good. We do not want your red meat; we want your trees". For our members, that is a difficult message, because, as Tom said, we are already very efficient in our use of carbon, in terms of livestock production. We are already sequestering carbon through our grasslands and hedgerows; we are already storing carbon in those soils. That is a difficult message to receive.

They feel scapegoated, in the sense that we are talking about 10% of our domestic emissions coming from agriculture, which means that 70% of



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our land is producing only 10% of the emissions. That means that the other 30% of land must be producing 90% of the emissions, and our members are being asked to soak up the emissions from the 30% of land.

The messaging needs to be a little more positive rather than negative, and we need to understand how these externalities play through. What if we offshore our carbon footprint by importing more red meat from abroad, if that is what happens? The Committee of Climate Change has called for a 20% reduction in dairy and beef production. Is that going to be achievable? Is that realistic? Inevitably we are going to suck in stuff from abroad.

The messaging needs to be a lot more positive, and you are right: we need to be thinking about the multifunctional benefits here. It is about carbon; it is about access; it is about amenity; it is about landscape; it is about flood risk management. It is about all those things and how we build those in together in a positive way.

Yes, agroforestry is really important. It is almost the thing that, as we have done today, is added on right at the end of the conversation about woodland, but actually there are a lot of real advocates and evangelists for this out there—people like Stephen Briggs in Cambridgeshire. He has a lot of good things to say about this. We need to be looking at agroforestry much more than we have done to date. In all things we need to have balance, and there was really lovely report yesterday from the National Sheep Association, which looked at sheep and the landscape, and what they deliver from a multivariant aspect. This is not a question of trees or cows; it has to be a bit more nuanced than that.

Dr Hudson: Thank you. That is really helpful. Chair, I think we have looked some of the incentives for agroforestry through the course of today, so I will leave that final supplementary.

Q211 **Chair:** Before you come in, Tom, I have a last question to all of you, really. You have all been talking about it. That is the land use, basically. We have solar panels; we have biodigesters; we still have a lot of maize and fodder beet being put into biodigesters; we have huge competition then for growing food for dairy cows and the beef sector. Do we have the incentive right for planting woodlands? If we have too big a grant on the one hand, we are perhaps going to drive more land into trees than we should. If we do not have enough, perhaps we do not get enough.

We are always asking our land, our farmers, our landowners, everybody, to do everything. I am really conscious this afternoon that you have all given really good answers. I will bring you in, Tom, then George and then Judicaelle. It comes back to land management, basically, and how much the Government precipitate the direction of land use, but how do we get this one right? The land is a finite amount. Are we getting it right at the moment? I will open it up to Tom to make the final comments he wanted to and answer my question. Then I will come to George and Judicaelle,



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and then we had better get our second panel of witnesses in, who are being very patient.

Tom Bradshaw: I can make the point I was going to make at the end of George's last point in relation to this point. You are right: whether it be feed, fuel, fibre, carbon or biodiversity, there are a lot of things we are being tasked with delivering. There are a lot of things that ELMS and Government policy are seen to be the solution to. That in itself creates an incredibly complicated policy area.

The one thing we have not talked about today is the heritage value of some of our countryside. Particularly when you think about where some of the tree planting has been talked about being targeted, some of our upland farmers are very disappointed to think that they have been chosen, that they will not be producing food, and that they will be planting massive amounts of woodland. The heritage value of some of that countryside is incredibly high. By making the wrong decisions, we could lose the culture that goes with it, the hefted sheep flocks, the centuries of history, because we put the wrong trees in the wrong place.

We must take all of that into account and really value our ancestral history, making sure that we are looking after that culture. It would be too easy at this stage to prioritise what in some people's minds are lower-value sites, but that have huge opportunity to provide food for the country and maintain that cultural value that is so important for those societies and those areas of the countryside.

Chair: Thank you. That is very well put.

George Dunn: Tom has hit it on the head. We run the risk of losing quite a lot as we rush headlong into an ill-thought-out target for tree planting, with very lucrative planting grants. I referred already, as you have done in your question, to the issue of solar and AD maize that has caused major problems throughout the country, as has been well documented. Even in the way we run agri-environmental schemes right now, with the destocking of uplands, the loss of those hefts and the dangers about wildfire that that will create, in terms of having landscapes that are overgrown, we are not thinking about these things as strategically as we ought to.

I would highly recommend that we all pay attention to Henry Dimbleby's report, which bothered to look at things in a strategic way. It did not just look at food as a siloed issue; it looked at it as food within the landscape. Yes, there are unpalatable bits of Henry's recommendations within that report, which we all have to work around, but at least it was an honest attempt to look at these things strategically. Defra will rue the day that it forgets that it asked Henry to produce that report, because it is a good place to start these sorts of discussions.

Q212 **Chair:** We have Henry coming in in a few weeks' time, so we will make sure that he gets a question framed around that. Thank you for those



comments. Judicaelle, from a CLA point of view, and from an overall point of view on how we deal with land and how we make use of a finite resource, what is your take on that? I know that is a rather large question, but it is one we need to face, really.

Judicaelle Hammond: I was going to say that, unfortunately, that is the million dollar question as far as my members are concerned at the moment. I do not want to repeat what other people have said, but there is uncertainty about the big picture of where we are trying to take agricultural policy and land management more generally, which is causing problems. It is creating planning blights.

As an individual member, it is difficult to make a decision for forestry, a bit or a lot, or other things at the moment, because you just do not know what the future is like. If you are looking at timeframes that are longer than the next three-year spending review, you want to know what the future is like before you make, in some cases, permanent decisions. It is really difficult at the moment.

Q213 **Chair:** Thank you to Judicaelle, George and Tom. It has been a really interesting session this afternoon. It has given us great evidence to put in our report, and I think we have really gone about it in a thoughtful way. You have all had slightly different views on things, but I think we have dealt with it in a very good way and got some good evidence. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Sir William Worsley, Steph Rhodes, Tony Juniper and Alan Law.

Q214 **Chair:** We will now bring in our second panel. Can I apologise for being a little late in getting to you? I think you probably found that session interesting and it will probably relate quite a lot to what you are going to now tell us in your answers. Could you introduce yourselves for the record, please?

Sir William Worsley: Delighted. I am William Worsley. I chair the Forestry Commission. I also chair the Howardian Hills AONB, so I am involved with protected and important landscapes. I was, until recently, the tree champion and the chair of the National Forest in the midlands.

Tony Juniper: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Tony Juniper. I am the chair of Natural England. I come to this role with a very long history of engagement with environmental subjects, including many linked with trees and forests.

Steph Rhodes: Good afternoon. I am Steph Rhodes. I am the delivery director for the tree planting programme with the Forestry Commission.

Alan Law: Good afternoon. I am Alan Law. I am on the executive team at Natural England, and, like Sir William and Steph, I sit on Defra's



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nature for climate programme board, which stands over the tree programme.

Q215 **Chair:** Thank you all very much for joining us in our second panel on tree planting. Naturally, we have been talking to the landowners, tenants and farmers on planting trees and forest, and looking at the future. It is going to be very interesting to see, from your perspectives, how you think the Government are doing on our various schemes coming forward.

How will the England trees action plan tackle the major barriers limiting our ability to treble woodland creation in this Parliament—because we are nearly two years into this Parliament now—for example, skills, nursery, supply and planting the right trees in the right place? It is quite a big question. I will bring in Sir William, first of all, from the Forestry Commission's point of view. Do you think we have the skills or the nursery supply? Can we plant the right trees in the right place? Do we know what they are? Tom Bradshaw made an interesting comment at the end of that panel: do we actually know the right tree in the right place?

Sir William Worsley: I will try to answer that question. It is a huge question. First, the England trees action plan was a document that went through considerable consultation, right across the sector, both before it was written and, indeed, in the normal statutory way after it was written. It got considerable buy-in and, indeed, support right across, and it has been followed by the England woodland creation offer, which is, as people on the last panel all agreed, a very generous grant offer, as an incentive to encourage people to plant trees. We need to persuade landowners and farmers to plant trees; that is why we have an incentive in this grant scheme.

Finding the right trees to plant in the right place is absolutely essential. We live in a wonderful country with some wonderful landscapes, and we have to manage them extremely carefully, but different trees are suitable in different places. We need to look at productive forestry, environmental forestry, wilding schemes and natural regeneration. They all have their different place.

The nursery sector, I believe, can rise to the challenge. We have a round table with the nursery sector later this month, with Lord Goldsmith, the Forestry Minister. We are in talks and communication with them. Plant health is extraordinarily important. We have terrible pests and diseases coming in, some of which blow across the channel, some of which have in the past been imported, and it is really important that we have a very robust plant health structure. When I was tree champion, I visited Felixstowe and Heathrow, looking at this, and to be honest I was pretty impressed.

I do not want to take more than my fair share of the time, but the question you have asked me is a huge question. I hope I have given you some guidance as to ways this can be done.



Q216 **Chair:** On the question of the nurseries and the capacity, as a Government and as an industry, we surely have to give these nurseries a clear direction of travel as to what trees to grow. You cannot suddenly produce a lot of trees in five minutes, can you? Whether they be your Forestry Commission nurseries, whether they be private nurseries, they will need to know what types of trees are going to be needed, let alone the disease control. Are we there yet, do you believe?

Sir William Worsley: The nurseries, of course, are extremely professional organisations. They are very well aware as to what the market is likely to demand. I do not think it is for us to dictate to the nurseries what they should be growing, because they are very well aware. However, we need to give the nurseries confidence about the demand for these trees, whether it is productive conifer trees or broadleaf trees, whether it is native broadleaves or non-natives. We need to work with them and give them the comfort that the trees they are growing will be required. What we do not want them to do is to worry about making significant investment that will not then be met.

Q217 **Chair:** Can I bring Tony Juniper in now? Further to a big enough question already, how would you differentiate between targets for different types of woodland, to help manage the tensions with creating new woodland for net zero, protecting and restoring habitats and biodiversity? Woodland is being asked an awful lot, from a nature conservation point of view?

Tony Juniper: This question is very much related to the point about the right tree in the right place. I am just reflecting back on the previous panel and the conversation briefly around the origin of the 30,000 hectares per year. That actually comes from a January 2020 Committee on Climate Change report that estimated we need to go from 13% to 17% woodland cover by 2050, which then translates into about 30,000 hectares per year. That was coming very much from a carbon perspective.

The target and the rationale for the target has that origin, but as time has gone on, of course, and the conversation today has really reflecting this, we have been appreciating the need to have a whole range of other objectives met at the same time as the carbon objective. There are about seven others, alongside carbon. There is biodiversity and nature recovery.

There is landscape beauty and making the country even more beautiful to be in. There is the purity of rivers and the role that trees can play in river water quality. There is flood risk reduction and the ability of trees to help us adapt to extreme weather. There is the supply of timber, of course, and wood, which is a vital aspect of all of this. Then there is the public access and recreation, and the extent to which people benefit from being in beautiful, wooded landscapes. Then on top of that, especially in urban areas, there is the question of reducing air pollution.



The right tree in the right place, we would argue, would be maximising as many of those things at once in the same locality. That is where, then, you can see some real opportunities for synergies, which we are seeking to build, between our work and that of the Forestry Commission, and with our colleagues at the Environment Agency, so that all three of us are delivering on as much of that as possible in the same place. Right tree, right place, raises a lot of complexity, but if we can master that the benefits to society will be so much greater. This then leads to—

Q218 **Chair:** I am sorry to interrupt you, Tony, but are you, as Natural England, giving due consideration to how much of the tree planting is down to storing carbon, bringing us towards net zero, and how much is about biodiversity? I know they are linked, but they are not necessarily the same trees. They are not necessarily plants in the same way, are they?

Tony Juniper: They can be.

Chair: Is that something you are giving consideration to?

Tony Juniper: Yes, very much so. We have had people working very hard on this, and helping us understand the evidence base, which tells us that, long term, the best carbon storage we are going to get is from native woodlands, comprised of broadleaf species. While I am on the subject of that, I am struck again by another framing of this whole conversation, which is around the notion of planting, excluding, therefore, at least in some parts of the conversation, the notion of natural regeneration.

William is quite right to highlight how there are a spectrum of management approaches here, which also include natural regeneration, which over time is going to be a very good way, in some localities at least, of maximising most of those ecosystem services—carbon capture and biodiversity recovery through natural processes—which actually minimise the chances of disease coming into the country because you do not need to be importing saplings.

You have things like jays and wood mice doing the planting for us, and, in the process, creating this incredibly vibrant and important scrub stage, whereby we get this variety of thorny, shrubby plants, which are providing habitats for pollinators and songbirds, and ultimately will lead to the kind of high-carbon storage woodland that is going in the same direction as the carbon target.

There is quite a lot packed into your question, but the answer is yes: we very much are looking at how to maximise the carbon at the same time as the biodiversity, and working closely with William and his teams to work through how best to do that.

Steph Rhodes: To further build on what both Sir William and Tony have just said, I would describe the notion of the right tree in the right place as having a fixed part and a moving part. The fixed part is the UK



forestry standard. It is the standard against which any woodland creation or natural colonisation proposal will be assessed. Does this meet the minimum requirements? The moving part is, as Tony eloquently identified, the range of objectives that that specific landowner might be pursuing, how this given piece of land might lend itself to these specific objectives and how woodland design can define them. There are these two components and it is our role, ultimately, to reconcile how the overarching policy ambition makes sense for them, if you are the landowner making a decision.

On the aspects that Tony was describing about the different options between natural colonisation and plantation, where we are keen to have a balance of both, there is at least behind the carbon objective an imperative of time and of certainty of establishment of a certain type of woodlands going forward that will sequester carbon early enough, but it absolutely needs not to be at the expense of natural colonisation. We are quite keen and are illustrating through the England woodland creation offer that we can and we will support both.

Lastly, on the last point around future resilience, we are again very keen to ensure that what is ultimately a risk management approach, since we do not know exactly what climate change will bring on specific sites, is managed through a diversity of approaches and species, which might include species brought from elsewhere as seeds, ideally not imported as saplings, to manage biosecurity as mentioned, so that we can better mitigate that risk.

Q219 Dave Doogan: Tony highlighted all the important aspects that have to be taken into consideration when discussing and deploying the tree planting strategy. We heard from the previous panel about the importance of considering food production. We have talked about the benefits in terms of flooding and the need to bear in mind challenges and opportunities with biodiversity. Can I invite Tony, though, to clarify whether he and his colleagues see climate as the principal ambition below which all other considerations have to be taken afterwards?

Tony Juniper: The way I would answer that would be to highlight how the climate change emergency is accompanied by a parallel, twin emergency in relation to the decline of nature. These two things are twins, because they are closely related and have a common origin. That closely related nature is seen, for example, in the extent to which we cannot meet 1.5 degrees without repairing the natural world. If we are to avoid the mass extinction of animals and plants going on, we have to limit temperatures very quickly. These two things are very closely linked, and trying to say which one is more important than the other probably does not help us that much. What does help us is to identify where we can find those integrated solutions and pursue both at once.

We have had very good discussions over recent times in the environmental community and policy community about so-called nature-based solutions, whereby we can repair the natural world to good effect



in capturing carbon, at the same time as helping nature and, indeed, the human world to adapt to the impacts of climate change. It is really those integrated spaces where we will make most progress. This is where looking at the tree and woodland agenda is very productive, because it probably sits most firmly in that space between climate and nature, alongside peatlands, giving us opportunities to pursue both at once.

Alan Law: It is important to remember that the natural environment is a system, and what we are trying to do, as Tony describes, in restoring health is to restore health to that system. We need to think, therefore, about where native trees play an important part in that system health, in supporting species and providing a range of service benefits, and where that is less important. There is space for both.

If I come back to some of the opening questions, we know where trees can be planted and where soils are suitable for those. We know where different types of trees provide different services for people and for biodiversity. We also know where we should not have trees, where they should not be planted, or where, in fact, they should be removed. The challenge we have at the moment is that the finances, as you were hearing earlier, mean that there is a shortage in supply of the marginal land needed to deliver tree planting of a range of purposes.

That has created something of an artificial question: is it a choice between biodiversity and carbon? We simply do not see it like that. There is suitable land for both, and at our peril do we damage the natural system by planting trees in the wrong place, as we did in places in the 1980s, and we are still now having to deal with the effects.

Chair: Thank you very much for those very good points.

Sir William Worsley: Can I just add to that?

Chair: We have a Division at 5.10 pm, so I want to finish by 5.10 pm. Come in very quickly, then, please, Sir William.

Sir William Worsley: Very quickly, one of the great things about woods is the multipurpose benefits that they produce, whether it is environment, carbon, timber or landscape. The key point I would make is that woods can provide many, many things all together, and that is one of the great pluses of trees.

Chair: It is about having a balance, using the right land and getting the right tree in the right place. We are drilling down on that quite nicely. Thank you very much, all of you, for those answers.

Q220 **Julian Sturdy:** I want to touch on the financial incentives, if we can quickly, given the time we have left. How will the England woodland creation offer incentivise farmers, foresters and landowners to make that important transition to creating and managing woodland going forward? I suppose this is really to Sir William and Tony.



Sir William Worsley: The answer is that the England woodland creation offer is probably the most generous and best planting grant we have had, certainly in living memory. Not only does it provide payments for planting, but it also provides £200 per hectare for 10 years and additional fund sources. That is really, really encouraging. Obviously, and the point was made by our previous speakers, the payment is only for 10 years. It would have been nice if it had been able to be for longer, but 10 years is pretty good.

We really need to try to find future markets that are beyond just timber and carbon. The feed-in tariff has been a real driver for windfarms and solar panels. Obviously the economic model is essential if we are to persuade farmers and land managers to look to planting trees as a sensible thing for them to be doing for their businesses.

Q221 **Julian Sturdy:** How many applicants has the England woodland creation offer had so far?

Sir William Worsley: I think it has had 130. Steph will tell me if I am wrong, but we have had more than 130 applications so far and it has only been out for about three months.

Steph Rhodes: To confirm, we have had just over 150 applications, but it changes by the day. To answer the previous question very briefly, the reason why we think we are going to create a good incentive for farmers to change the land use in particular is that we have devoted a considerable amount of time to economic modelling as to what land use change from current farming use to new land use would entail, direct and indirect costs, to try to pitch the offer right. We introduced the really truly innovative future of the England woodland creation offer, which is contribution to payment for public benefits, which has not been implemented to date. That is the main driving innovation that we hope is going to make a difference.

Julian Sturdy: Tony, do you want to come in on that first point?

Tony Juniper: These questions about the incentives, of course, relate to the point about the right tree for the right place. The fact is that neither the Forestry Commission nor Natural England has control over the vast majority of land where trees ideally will be established in the future. We need to come up with an incentive regime that can begin to encourage people to change land use, effectively. Of course, this is long-term land use by definition and has really quite serious economic ramifications in terms of the return one can get from woodland in the long and medium term.

This is where the point becomes one of what the incentives are beyond that 10-year initial establishment phase. How can we, as William said, help to bring in private sector finance via new markets? At the moment there is kind of a market for carbon, and there is certainly a market for wood, but what we would urgently welcome at Natural England is building



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up the structures that can create and sustain a market in clean water, in nitrate and nutrient capture, and in flood risk reduction. The exam question becomes one of how we can encourage private sector investment to achieve what are presently non-market outcomes and to stack those on top of each other, so we can really reward the right tree, right place values we spoke about a moment ago.

One of the things we, at Natural England, would say would help this is to create some certainty for both buyers and sellers in those future markets that we hope will exist, through some kind of certification and accreditation, which the likes of us and the Forestry Commission could work on, in order to say that this particular woodland is delivering those benefits to this level. We can say that; therefore, the value of those ecosystem services is X pounds; then that could be offered into the market. We are not there yet, but that is where hopefully, over the horizon, we can start to build on the woodland creation offer to create those longer-term incentives.

Alan Law: As William has said, there is a very generous package of incentives available to encourage tree planting, but the duration of maintenance payments alongside that is relatively short. That may work for large estates that want to make an investment as part of a mixed portfolio and plant trees based on an assumption that there will be an increase in carbon markets or a commercial sale of timber. What it will not do is deal with smaller farmers and family farms that face depreciating capital value of their land and uncertainty, post 10 years, as to what kind of support they are going to get.

We need some kind of bridge. As Sir William mentioned, the feed-in tariffs around wind energy and solar are well-established, but we need a tariff here that is not solely based on carbon, because that would merely skew that equation and increase the competition between nature and biodiversity. We need a supplement to that feed-in tariff that pays for those wider ecosystem services that we can see, up until a time where we see a catch-up in the carbon market and properly costed ecosystem benefits that can also be bought into and paid for in the market. There is a need for some leadership here from the state sector to drive this.

Q222 **Julian Sturdy:** Building on from that, what evidence do you have that the environmental land management schemes will make it economically viable for farmers and landowners to create and manage woodland going forward, as well as delivering the net-zero ambitions?

Chair: Can I ask each time that one of you from each of the Forestry Commission and Natural England answers the question, please? I cannot take four comments on each part of the question. It is just not going to work. Please make up your mind who is going to answer the question.

Julian Sturdy: Tony had the last question. We will take Sir William on this.



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Chair: Yes, take Sir William first and then Tony. If the other of you wants to come in, please make it much quicker. We are taking far too long over every question.

Sir William Worsley: The key thing is that the environmental land management scheme is looking at the whole holding. It is absolutely essential that that includes woodland as well as agricultural land. I speak both as a farmer and as a forester. When you are looking at your landholding, you look at the whole. That is the key to getting the support on both of these correct.

Q223 **Julian Sturdy:** There have been some concerns raised about the slow progress and the clarity of ELMS going forward, and because of that it is going to limit tree planting ability going forward. Would you agree with that criticism?

Sir William Worsley: The England woodland creation offer is well linked in with ELM. Yes, ELM is moving much more slowly than we would have liked, and of course it is absolutely key that ELM is right to get the woods we already have into management. I might let Steph quickly follow up on that.

Steph Rhodes: Very briefly, EWCO has been identified as the precursor to ELM, so we have been working extremely closely with the ELM teams in terms of the design, the payment rates and in particular the approach to the payment for public benefits, which are going to be the key focus for the future. We will make sure we share responses to the next question, Chair.

Q224 **Chair:** Can we bring Tony in very quickly? Is Natural England happy with the way the ELM schemes are being developed and are you getting the right inputs from your perspective?

Tony Juniper: We are feeding in very closely and actively with the ELM team. Just to register the complexity of the policy-making going on there, seeking to base the policy on the tests and trials, and therefore on evidence, plus co-designing the policy with the landowning and land managing community, almost by definition means that we will not know the answer immediately. There is work in progress there and it is extremely complicated.

One of the complexities is the alignment with this wider discussion about trees and the farmed landscape. There are two things we would say in relation to that. One is the potential role of agroforestry, which was mentioned before, and being able to grow food from trees in the agricultural landscape; and the other is the ability to get a lot more trees into the land by establishing them in hedgerows. One figure that struck me, which I saw the other day, was that putting trees 20 metres apart in each of the hedgerows we have in England would add 40 million trees without taking up any farmland, going back to the point made earlier about the choice between agriculture and tree establishment. Those are a



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couple of points that we could see in addition to what Steph and William said.

Chair: That is a very interesting statistic. In the Blackdown Hills, we have a lot of trees in the hedgerows as it is, so it is an interesting point.

Julian Sturdy: That is a good point on the hedgerows that I had not thought about.

Chair: We shall have to check your figures, Tony, but I am sure they are correct.

Tony Juniper: We will check them again

Q225 **Dave Doogan:** Sir William, the Horticultural Trades Association informed us that nurseries will not be in a position to grow the number of plants needed for the 2024 deadline for the England trees action plan. You mentioned earlier the esteem you hold nurseries in. Do you agree with the assessment of the Horticultural Trades Association?

Steph Rhodes: The short answer is that we probably broadly agree with the assessment, in the current state of the sector, accepting that the transparency of what is currently produced by the sector is partly limited, because of the sector's desire, quite understandably, to protect some of this information from a commercial point of view. Our assessment of the rate of growth required in the years to come makes it quite likely.

What are we doing in response to that? To help the current nurseries upscale and upskill in order to meet this target, we are doing things to improve the visibility of what is coming down the woodland creation pipeline, as Sir William mentioned earlier. We are providing grants to improve efficiency, biosecurity and diversity of what is already produced, and providing innovation grants. We have been monitoring quite carefully what the response is like, and certainly there are recent instances of the private sector taking on what used to be supplies provided by Forestry England, which indicates there is a genuine appetite for growth.

All that said, it would be foolish, we assess, as a programme, to assume these future needs would be met. In parallel, we are planning for the scenario where additional imports would be needed for the short-term, while the nursery capacity increased. The nature for climate fund has put aside some additional funding to increase the capacity and improve the processes to inspect imports. We are equipped both to have a plan A to grow the domestic capacity, and to be able to deal with potentially increased imports, if that is what happens in the short-term.

Q226 **Dave Doogan:** In the event, let us say, that there is insufficient domestic capacity and seedlings have to be imported, there is obviously a clear risk there from non-native pests and diseases. What work is each of your organisations undertaking to minimise that biosecurity threat to these islands?



Sir William Worsley: Perhaps I might come in here and follow on from what Steph said. First, the forest nurseries take biosecurity very, very seriously. The industry, with input from Government, has created the plant health management standard as a certification scheme. Also, the checks at our borders are pretty stringent. While we would like to see as much as possible produced from our own nurseries, we can, if we need to, purchase and supply healthy stock both nationally and internationally.

Tony Juniper: I would reemphasise the point made earlier about natural regeneration, and the extent to which we can avoid at least some level of biosecurity through letting nature regenerate young trees through natural processes. Additional benefits that will come with this include adaptation to climate change as well. Not only do we get a biodiversity benefit in the short-term going through that scrub stage as we move towards closed canopy woodland through a natural process, but we would naturally be creating young saplings from local stock, which through a process of natural selection would be suited to the local conditions.

One anecdote on this that I gleaned a few months ago, which I thought was really important, was the extent to which trees in southern England at the Knepp Estate, for example, in Sussex are being pollinated to some degree by trees far away in the Mediterranean basin, with pollen grains drifting that far, according to analysis that is being done down there. For an oak tree growing in Sussex, some of the acorns will be pollinated by trees growing in the southern part of the continent, thereby bringing in genetic material that might well help those tree species in the future to be resilient to climate change by having those warmer condition variants already growing here.

There are multiple benefits that we might look at in the future coming from this process of harnessing, for some purposes, those natural processes. This is not to say, of course, that it is the only thing we need to do. Of course it is not. There will still, of course, be plantations of wood, including those with non-native species. But I will just emphasise the multiple benefits of natural regeneration for biodiversity, biosecurity, climate change adaptation, and indeed, over time, for carbon capture too.

Alan Law: We talk sometimes about resilience of the plant stocks on sites. In a context in which there is a shortage of seed stock, importing seed stock from overseas on some of the woodland sites that are perhaps better reliant on natural regeneration on the grounds of resilience could be avoided. It would reduce the pressure on seed stocks, and also allow that natural regeneration and home-grown resilience to be established on those sites.

Q227 **Chair:** I suppose that is provided that the tree stock is healthy, is it not? The only downside to that is that, where you have unhealthy natural trees in those areas, you are going to have to replant with something that is more resilient. It works in some places, but not everywhere. Would I be right in that assumption?



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Tony Juniper: Yes. There is no one thing that works everywhere, so we are always going to be looking at a spectrum of approaches to do what we would like to achieve in the end. But I will just emphasise that natural regeneration point linked to that biosecurity question.

Q228 **Dave Doogan:** Sir William, how will closing the Wykeham nursery affect the England trees action plan and its aim to improve domestic supply?

Sir William Worsley: The answer is that it will not. The Wykeham nursery only supplies to Forestry England. Traditionally, the two Forestry England nurseries at Delamere and Wykeham have supplied to the whole of the United Kingdom. Scotland is tending to move away from buying from England to its own resource, as is Wales, which has reduced the plant requirement.

We are also investing significantly in the Delamere nursery, and, as a commercial proposition, we have decided to make significant investment in Delamere. Therefore, this will not affect the private sector at all. Indeed, Forestry England intends to offer the leasehold of the Wykeham nursery site under open competition later in 2021. If there is demand from the private sector, there may well be the opportunity for them to take this nursery on. This is about creating a really efficient plant nursery for Forestry England at Delamere.

Q229 **Chair:** If Ian Byrne, who is a Committee member, were here today, he would be very strong with you, Sir William, to say that closing down forestry nurseries is not really helping with the production of trees. Can I just ask one final question on that? You say you are building up Delamere. Will that be producing the type of trees that were previously produced at the other nursery?

Sir William Worsley: Yes. First, you could argue that it is a cost of devolution that we will supply less to England and Wales. Obviously, we need to produce trees in an economically sustainable way. We will produce more than enough trees for own resources from the Delamere nursery, and to a higher standard. If there is a requirement from the private sector to take Wykeham on, we will really be quite pleased to see that.

Chair: We will park that one there. Thank you very much for that answer.

Q230 **Robbie Moore:** I just wanted to focus on the workforce skills agenda. Sir William, we have heard evidence that the lack of a skilled workforce is one of the most important barriers to achieving the UK's tree planting targets. I was just wondering how you intend to address this issue.

Sir William Worsley: You are absolutely right; there is a clear market failure here in the provision of forestry education. We are investigating ways of working in partnership, and this is right across the industry. I am a chartered surveyor by profession. When I was at agricultural college, forestry was a significant part of my training. It is not really now in the



sector, and that is a disadvantage. You then go right the way down to the forester on the beat.

We need to get more skilled people in, and the key to this is for people to see forestry and woodland management as an exciting, viable career. With the work that is going on, the investment in tree planting, and the targets of tree planting that we have, it is a really exciting career for people to have. There is the ability at the professional level for land agents to retrain, and you are seeing the beginning of this in some of the land agency firms. You are seeing people who read countryside management seeing woodland management as a way forward. You are seeing foresters down on the forest floor coming in, and we certainly are recruiting quite a lot of people at the moment in Forestry England and the Forestry Commission. We will be training those people on.

Q231 Robbie Moore: It is almost a multifaceted challenge. It is giving people the knowledge in terms of providing pure and proper advice, including to the land agents, but also making sure that you have the skillset from foresters on the ground. I was just wondering where you feel that challenge lies. When we are dealing with land-based colleges, education settings, or FE colleges that are able to provide that knowledge base and skillset, this is a sector that seems to fall between two stools in terms of Government Departments. It sits with Defra, the Department for Education, or the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy. How can those dots be joined together in terms of getting the right skillset on the ground?

Sir William Worsley: You are absolutely right. One of the things you have to realise is that, for the last 30 years, forestry has not been a terribly exciting career. As a result, a lot of people have not been wanting to go into this sector because they have not seen it as having a very bright future. Therefore, it has been difficult to get people on to the courses, which has meant that the courses have not been full and fewer people have been providing the courses. We need forestry, woodland management and landscape management to be seen as a really good career for people to go into, and then we need the courses to be provided.

It is a bit of supply and demand. We need the sectors and education. It comes at different levels, but certainly at the moment—and you are seeing this right across the sector—we are struggling to get good forestry contractors because there are not that many. People will see opportunity there.

Q232 Robbie Moore: I just one have one final point focusing on funding. This inevitably feeds into every challenge. We have heard evidence from the Royal Forestry Society and the Institute of Chartered Foresters that no money has been allocated to the forestry skills action plan and that there is little cross-Government work going on to address this skills gap that we have identified. I was just wondering if you could expand on that. How would you respond to that comment around funding and little



cross-Government work being done to address this issue?

Sir William Worsley: I am going to start this and see if Steph may be able to pick up on the funding. When I took on the chair of the Forestry Commission, works for skills was one of first things that I raised as an issue, along with nurseries, which we have already talked about, because I do see this as an issue. Part of this, as I have already mentioned, is to do with the attractiveness of the career for people. Steph, do you have information on funding?

Steph Rhodes: Very broadly, we have secured this year through the nature for climate fund some early funding to support this skills work. This is going to be immensely helped by the fact that we reran the 2017 workforce survey, which gave us a very good picture in mid-August of what is currently in the workforce and the projected needs to 2025 and 2030. It is going to give us a really good foundation to bid for further funding with a strong argument as to where we are starting from, the size and shape of the gap, and how best we want to address it.

Touching upon the point you were making earlier as well, there are lots of actors in the sector. We are trying to bring the different providers and to have discussions with our counterparts in devolved Administrations, because this is by no means an England-only issue, in order to take a concerted approach to address the workforce issue.

Alan Law: There are three quick things. First, Sir William differentiated between foresters and woodland managers. We are not finding a shortage in terms of bringing woodland ecologists into the organisation.

Secondly, as the Committee will know, Natural England has been operating under single-year budgets for number of years now. We will hopefully welcome an announcement around a multiyear settlement in due course. We have brought in additional capacity this year to support the England woodland creation offer and our projections are that we will continue to increase next year, so we do not see that as a skills-limiting factor at our end.

Lastly, I would point out that, under for nature for climate fund, investment is going to woodland creation partnerships around the country to build up capacity and skills on the ground, and thereby generate some of the applications that we need to see at a landscape scale.

Q233 **Dr Hudson:** We are in the final furlong, but we are back on to the right tree in the right place again. Through the course of the inquiry, we have heard that a lack of accurate habitat data may hinder efforts to plant the right trees in the right places and potentially treble woodland planting by 2024. What steps are you taking to address this? Will you have these data in time to meet that target?

Tony Juniper: We do have questions around data availability, which is part of that conundrum linked to control of land and knowing where to think the right tree might be in the right place. Having that basic data is



another challenge alongside the others we have discussed today. Hopefully, over the coming years, we will find some of those data gaps closing as a result of work that Defra is now putting together around the natural capital and ecosystem assessment initiative that we are feeding into and helping to shape. That will give both the Forestry Commission and Natural England a much better basis to think about things like how we avoid wader habitat and maximise ecosystem service benefits.

Another thing that we have not talked about yet specifically, which is linked to the data side, is how we avoid other priority habitats that are better without trees. For example, different types of heathlands and grasslands are very important for their own biodiversity values and, indeed, sometimes carbon values, especially peatlands. How can we recognise the value of those as we seek to increase tree cover in line with the policy, which we support? The data also needs to give us some sense of that as well as where to put the trees.

Dr Hudson: You are optimistic that the data will be there.

Alan Law: The data is coming on. In the meantime, we are working very well with the Forestry Commission on, for example, survey guidelines to make sure that we evaluate land that is coming forward effectively, and decision trees around how we make the right choices about planting options in the right place. We work very well with the Forestry Commission to establish protocols around tree planting in relation to peaty soils, for example. The data is one part of it.

Q234 **Dr Hudson:** I will hand over to the Forestry Commission, then. Steph, what is your perspective? Is there any tension between the Forestry Commission and Natural England in terms of these mapping data to allow you to deliver the programmes?

Steph Rhodes: We might come from slightly different vantage points at times. There is absolute joined-up working on how we go about working in practice. There are three aspects in what Tony and Alan flagged. The first one is improving the access to the datasets in general, so that anybody can access a national dataset and start preparing a project at an early stage. There is an element of joint working on this, improving quality, accuracy and access to this data.

The second element that Alan touched upon is that, on a case-by-case basis, for a number of reasons, we might want to look more particularly at the vegetation and the likelihood of wading birds being on that site. Here, we have provided some survey briefs to help landowners or managers carry out surveys appropriately to find out what they need to find out or commission it appropriately. It informs case-by-case discussions between the FC, NE and other stakeholders about what it means.

The third part of our joint work, which is probably the most interesting, is what the data tells us to do, or not to do, and how. That is where we use



this forever-improving evidence to develop some joint operational guidance in order to give clarity to our staff, but probably more importantly to the landowners and managers, as to what these types of features and contexts will mean in terms of what we are going to encourage or not. We have recent examples of the interim peat guidance or the interim guidance on wading birds.

In answer to your question, are we confident that the data will be there? I am confident that this is constantly improving, but it does not have a defined end state.

Q235 **Dr Hudson:** It is improving, but we might not be there yet. Our Committee would really plead for the two organisations to work together so that those data are available for the delivery. In summary, then, do you feel confident that your organisations are developing that strategy of an integrated “right tree in the right place” approach? Are you confident?

Chair: Can we have very quick answers, please, from both of you?

Sir William Worsley: I have a very quick answer. The answer is yes. We are working extremely well together as organisations. There has been a huge amount of consultation.

Tony Juniper: I will say the same thing. It is worth adding, as evidence of this, that the Forestry Commission and Natural England will be hosting a joint staff conference with about 200 colleagues in December, to think through exactly how we can do this delivery of the right tree in the right place through joined-up joint working. We are going to the next stage now from the strategic to the delivery side.

Dr Hudson: That is encouraging.

Chair: That is really good news. Thank you very much. We will go quickly on to the last question. If the Division Bell goes, we will have to finish the question in writing, but hopefully we will get through it.

Q236 **Rosie Duffield:** This is mostly to William and Tony. The England trees action plan aims to streamline regulatory processes and strengthen environmental controls. What steps have you taken to ensure both those aims? How will you ensure that streamlining does not lead to weaker environmental controls?

Tony Juniper: Do you have any knowledge, Alan, in terms of what the detail of that is?

Alan Law: We are working with the Forestry Commission on trying to ensure that we have guidelines around pre-application for EIA. We are putting in place additional resource to work with around screening and processing applications. We are very supportive of trying to undertake regulation in an efficient way and support the customers around that. This is not a time for deregulation or rushing through applications that



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might prove damaging to the environment. It is very much back to the capacity and joint working questions that you have covered.

Sir William Worsley: Our two organisations are working very well together, as indeed we are with the other parts of the Defra group. There is consultation and understanding of each other to try to make a robust system work efficiently. In order to achieve that, we need the people on the group to be able to deliver it.

Q237 **Rosie Duffield:** There is one final part, if we can get away with it. We have been told that your organisations require more resources to improve service delivery and help reach the woodland cover targets. If so, what extra resources do you need, and how would they be deployed?

Chair: Tony, we do not have enough time for your whole wish list, so get stuck in, please.

Tony Juniper: There is a range of targets alongside the tree target that the Government are aspiring to meet. These include targets that will flow from the Environment Bill on nature recovery and the 30 by 30 target that came from the Leaders' Pledge for Nature last year. There is a lot of big stuff on the table, and it is going to require people with boots on out in the field speaking to people who manage and own land to be able to deliver it.

Chair: Tony, the Division Bell has gone. Can I ask you to give any further answer to that in writing? Sir William, can I also ask you to give that last question in writing?

Thank you very much for a very good evidence session, Sir William, Steph, Tony and Alan. I am sorry that I have to bring the meeting to a close so quickly because the Division Bell has gone. It is quite a controversial Division, so we had better get there. Thank you all very much for a great session. Please add anything that you would like or have thought of afterwards to your written evidence and we will take it. I think we have got through pretty well. Thank you very much, all of you.