



House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

Tree Planting: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2021–22

**First Special Report of Session
2022–23**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 7 May 2022*

HC 323

Published on 20 June 2022
by authority of the House of Commons

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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Committee staff

Alexander Bellis (Committee Specialist), Ian Blair (Committee Operations Officer), Mark Doyle (Media Officer), Andy French (Committee Specialist), Ellie Goodchild (Committee Specialist), Tim Jarrett (Second Clerk), Annabel Russell (Committee Operations Officer), Chloe Sawyers (Committee Operations Manager) and Ben Williams (Committee Clerk).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1119; the Committee's email address is efracom@parliament.uk.

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First Special Report

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published its Third Report of Session 2021–22, [Tree planting](#) (HC 356), on 21 March 2022. The Government Response was received on 27 May 2022 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

The Government welcomes the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee's report on tree planting. Trees are at the forefront of Defra's contribution to the Government's plans to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, to help bend the curve of biodiversity loss, to create thousands of green jobs and better connect people with nature as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Our aim is to establish more trees, in the right places, to deliver multiple benefits for the climate, nature, the economy and people.

The Government's [England Trees Action Plan \(ETAP\)](#), published in May 2021, sets out the long-term, generational vision for the forestry sector to 2050. The ETAP's five chapters includes over 90 policy announcements and measures we will take over this Parliament to achieve the long-term vision.

The ETAP is central to the Government's pledge to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. It is supported by the £760 million Nature for Climate Fund to deliver tree planting, establishment and management, and peatland restoration. Through this funding, by 2025, in England, we will have:

- Trebled tree planting rates, meeting our target of planting at least 7,500 hectares.
- Established a framework for the future of tree planting that will continue into the Environment Land Management programme and beyond.
- Provided significant funding to build nursery capacity, supporting public and private sector nurseries and seed suppliers to enhance the quantity and quality of domestic tree production.
- Published a policy roadmap identifying key actions for Government, the construction sector, the timber sector, and academia to safely increase timber use in construction.
- Seen the first graduates of our new apprenticeship scheme as well as developed new training routes into the forestry sector.
- Built a new Centre for Forest Protection and developed a Woodland Resilience Implementation Plan to improve the ecological condition of woodlands and increase resilience to climate change, pests, and disease.

Update on progress since October 2020

Since the launch of the EFRA Committee's inquiry in October 2020 and the publication of the Government's England Trees Action Plan in March 2021, significant progress has been made. So far, the Government has:

- Launched the ground-breaking England Woodland Creation Offer, which will pay land managers to plant the right trees in the right places and offers public money for public benefits delivered by woodlands with specific design in specific location through additional contribution payments.
- Supported the existing network of 10 Community Forests (CFs) across the country, launched three new Community Forests in Plymouth and South Devon, Cumbria Coastal and the North-East, planting over 1,000 hectares across these 13 sites and bringing new woodland creation projects to 20% of England's most deprived areas.
- Launched the Woodlands for Water partnership, which will use tree planting to reduce pollution along hundreds of miles of rivers.
- Launched the Trees Call to Action Fund, to support the development of new and existing projects and partnerships which will help organisations build capacity to deliver the England Trees Action Plan.
- Held the first round and opened the second round of four major grant schemes the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf), Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF), Woodland into Management Innovation Fund (WiMIF) and Tree Production Innovation Fund (TPIF). The UTCf will level up access to nature across the country by targeting tree planting toward socially deprived urban areas with low canopy cover. The LATF will provide grants to local authorities to restore tree cover in non-woodland areas which may have been impacted by issues such as disease, habitat degradation or ageing tree stock. WiMIF will improve the ecological condition and resilience of woodlands via increased levels of woodland management, and TPIF will enhance the quantity, quality and diversity of tree planting stock available for planting in England
- Announced a new Development Woodland Officer apprenticeship programme, jointly led by the Forestry Commission, the University of Cumbria and the Institute of Chartered Foresters, which will help kick-start careers in the forestry sector.
- Worked with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to update the National Planning Policy Framework and published new guidance through the National Model Design Code to make clear the government's expectation that trees should be included in the built environment, including design parameters for the placement of street trees.
- Introduced a range of measures to support trees and woodland through the Environment Act (2021), including unlimited fines for illegal felling, new

powers to encourage replanting on illegally felled land, and a new duty for local authorities in England to consult the public before felling a tree on an urban road.

- Launched a consultation on new targets under the Environment Act (2021), including to increase England's woodland cover and tree canopy cover outside woodlands from 14.5% to 17.5% by 2050. This is equivalent to planting 420,00 hectares of woodland or an area the size of Somerset.
- Published a Nature Recovery Green Paper in which we made the following proposals:
 - Strengthening our commitment on no net reduction in the size of the nation's forests managed by Forestry England.
 - Considering new statutory duties and powers for the Forestry Commission, which reflect the social and environmental importance of its woodlands as well as their timber value.
 - Proposing to establish priority areas for woodland creation by completing large scale 'Afforestation Strategic Assessments'.
- The Government welcomes the recommendations made in the EFRA Committee's report on tree planting recommendations and in many cases has already taken action, or is planning action to address these:
- In March 2022 the Planting Trees in England [NAO report](#) set out the planned planting profile for the Nature for Climate Programme between now and 2024/25 and this is set out again below in response to recommendation one on annual targets.
- On mapping and guidance for Local Authorities, the Forestry Commission will be publishing an updated sensitivity map for woodland creation by the end of May 2022, and later this year Defra will be publishing guidance for Local Authorities to develop their local tree and woodland strategies.
- The transition from the Nature for Climate Programme to Environmental Land Management Schemes is an on-going priority for Defra. We published further information regarding our environmental land management schemes in January 2022 and committed to publishing more details on the full list of options under the Local Nature Recovery scheme (LNR) later in 2022. As we publish further information throughout the year, we will also provide greater detail where we can on what this means for people in existing agreements. As Lord Goldsmith has committed on several occasions no one will be unfairly disadvantaged as a result of planting trees now rather than waiting for Environment Land Management (ELM) schemes – meaning there is no reason to delay planting now.
- On funding, as confirmed in the Net Zero Strategy, we have boosted the Nature for Climate Fund with a further £124 million of new money, ensuring a total spend of more than £760m by 2025 on tree planting, establishment and management, and peatland restoration. More details on the outcomes this funding will secure are set out below.

- Defra remains committed to increasing the capability and capacity of the sector by supporting apprenticeships, T Levels and other technical training routes into the forestry sector and develop higher technical and professional education routes. Through the Green Jobs Delivery Group, we continue to work alongside BEIS, DfE and DWP to ensure the UK is building the workforce needed to deliver a green industrial revolution.
- Increasing the use of domestic timber is a priority for the Government and we committed in the ETAP and Net Zero Strategy (NZS) to increase the safe use of timber in construction. We have established a cross-Government and cross-industry Timber in Construction policy roadmap working group to design a policy roadmap identifying key actions to safely increase timber use in construction.
- Defra is undertaking a Post Implementation Review (PIR) on the 2017 amendments to the Forestry Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This will include stakeholder views and will conclude mid-2022.
- Government is consulting on proposals to remove permanency requirements for certain forestry practices within the consultation on the [Nature Recovery Green Paper](#) published on 16th March 2022 and once the consultation closes on 27 June 2022, we will be reviewing the results of this.

Detailed responses to all the Committee's recommendations are set out below.

Government Response to Recommendations

Tree Planting Targets

1/ Annual Targets

We recommend that, by May 2022, the UK Government should set clear, annual targets for England's contribution to reaching the overall UK goal for planting of 30,000 hectares of trees a year by 2024. (Paragraph 14)

The Nature for Climate Fund Tree Programme is designed to put tree-planting in England on the trajectory required for the UK to meet government's net zero target. It aims to increase annual tree-planting rates to 30,000 hectares per year across the UK, with England planting at least 7,500 hectares per year by March 2025, planting over 29k hectares of new woodland between 2020 and 2025 and sequestering 8.75 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent by 2050.

The delivery profile of the Nature for Climate Fund Tree Programme is back loaded to allow for new grants to become embedded and the skilled workforce and sapling supply needed for increased tree planting to start building up. A number of new grants and partnerships were launched in 2021 – these will deliver an increased rate of new tree planting each year as awareness of the offers is increased and as tree planting schemes in the pipeline translate to trees in the ground.

The planned delivery profile to increase planting rates is outlined below:

- 21/22: 2,500 hectares of planting across England
- 22/23: 5,500 ha
- 23/24: 6,500 ha
- 24/25: 7,500 ha

For this ambition to be met Defra and its delivery partners will need to continue to take action to support strong uptake of the new tree planting offers already launched through the Nature for Climate Fund, as well as delivering several new initiatives, including exploring support for planting on vacant and derelict land, and increasing levels of private funding for woodland creation.

This trajectory will then lead towards the longer-term Environment Act target we are currently consulting on, supported by a relevant interim target.

Annual Official Statistics detailing woodland creation rates, including government funded woodland creation, are published in June each year with interim statistics published on a quarterly basis.

2/ Data Mapping and 3/ Local Guidance for LNRS

We recommend that, by May 2022, Defra, the Forestry Commission and Natural England set out a plan for completing the data mapping work needed to allow it to ensure trees are not planted in locations where they will damage the environment. (Paragraph 23)

We therefore recommend that the Government produces more comprehensive guidance for local authorities to help them manage and make decisions about competing priorities for land use when creating their Local Nature Recovery Strategies. (Paragraph 24)

The Forestry Commission's 'Low Risk Land Map for Woodland Creation' provides an easily accessible, broad screening of the major environmental constraints and sensitivities affecting forestry projects, identifying 3.2 million hectares of low-risk land. The tool screens for protected landscapes, agriculturally high-quality land, priority habitat, important wildlife sites, deep peat, and Scheduled Monuments.

The Forestry Commission plans to publish an updated sensitivity map for woodland creation by the end of May 2022. The map identifies and informs decisions by identifying landscape sensitivities as well as less productive, lower grade agricultural land. The map will reflect recent guidance to protect upland breeding wader habitat and all peaty soils in England. The sensitivity map will continue to be updated as further datasets become available, including England's revised peat map.

The England Woodland Creation Offer targets supplementary payments to locations where public goods, for example biodiversity, flood resilience, water quality improvement, health and well-being and public access, can best be provided by new woodland. Targeting maps are available on the Forestry Commission's map browser to help applicants, in conjunction with the low-risk map for woodland creation, identify the best places to locate new woodland.

The Government is currently developing the regulations and statutory guidance needed to enable the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies to begin across the whole of England, following their establishment in the Environment Act late last year.

Regulations will set out the procedure that responsible authorities must follow in preparing their Local Nature Recovery Strategy, including how they must work with other local partner organisations. Statutory guidance will expand upon the detail provided by the Environment Act to set out what a Local Nature Recovery Strategy should contain.

In 2022, Defra will be publishing guidance for Local Authorities to develop their local tree and woodland strategies. Alongside the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, these efforts will enable local authorities to take additional oversight and responsibility over local tree planting policies.

We are also producing the Natural Capital and Ecosystems Assessment (NCEA) which will improve the quality of data, providing better granularity on species distribution, habitat extents for LNRS, biodiversity data, peatlands data, and soil health monitoring. NCEA data will also support the evaluation of policy interventions, for example Environmental Land Management schemes.

Across government, we are working with the Geospatial Commission's National Land Data Programme (NLDP) to improve access to authoritative land use data and enable more joined-up and coordinated government policy making and local delivery.

Incentivising Tree Planting

4/ Transition to ELM

We recommend that Defra and the Forestry Commission urgently prioritise the publication of a clear and detailed timeline for the introduction of the ELM schemes, including how the EWCO and ELM schemes will fit together, by May 2022. It is essential that Defra does this promptly to give farmers and others the certainty they need to kickstart planting. By September 2022, Defra should also publish and invite comments on its modelling that underpins the new incentives regime for tree planting. (Paragraph 34)

Farmers and land managers who take up EWCO now will be able to transfer their contract into a future environmental land management scheme at future agreed points without any loss of benefits. As Defra Ministers have previously said, no one will unfairly disadvantaged by planting trees now rather than waiting for ELM schemes. This is because ELM schemes for woodland will be based on EWCO rather than designing any separate scheme from the ground up.

We published further information regarding our environmental land management schemes in January 2022 and committed to publishing more details on the full list of options under the Local Nature Recovery scheme (LNR) later in 2022. This will include how farmers can get involved, as well as more details on scheme rules and how much we will pay for options to allow people to plan their participation in the scheme. We recognise that providing certainty and clarity on the new environmental land management schemes

is important. As we publish further information on [LNR](#) and the [Sustainable Farming Incentive](#) (SFI) across the year, we will also provide greater detail where we can on what this means for people in existing agreements.

In addition to LNR, the application process for Landscape Recovery was launched on 01 February 2022 and will close on 24 May 2022. Defra intends to launch a second round of pilot projects in 2023 and will confirm the proposed theme(s) for that round later in 2022.

5/ Woodland Maintenance Payments / 6/ Tree Planting Funding

We recommend that Defra and the Forestry Commission review the length of the maintenance payment and, if they decide to keep it unchanged, provide further information and guidance on what forms of additional private finance and economic opportunities landowners should seek to bridge the funding gap. (Paragraph 40)

Defra needs to clearly set out what it can achieve with the current funding allocated to woodland creation and management, and what the gap is between this and the Government's ambitions. Defra, HM Treasury, and the sector should work together to create a plan to fill any funding gaps to secure the level of funding required to support a robust woodland creation contribution to reaching net zero. (Paragraph 44)

As confirmed in the Net Zero Strategy, we have boosted the Nature for Climate Fund with a further £124 million of new money, ensuring a total spend of more than £760m by 2025 on tree planting, establishment and management, and peatland restoration. The fund aims to enable the Tree Programme to deliver the following investment objectives by 2024/25:

- Put tree-planting in England on the trajectory required for the UK to meet government's net zero target, increasing annual tree-planting rates across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year, with England planting at least 7,500 hectares per year by March 2025; planting 28,728 hectares of new woodland between 2020–21 and 2024–25; sequestering 8.75 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent by 2050.
- Contribute to the Nature Recovery Network by creating high-quality habitats that recover wildlife and provide wider environmental, social, and economic benefits, including climate mitigation (shared objective with peatland restoration).
- Restore more than 24,000ha priority new habitat including on newly created woodlands and restored peatlands, and in adjacent land, particularly in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks (shared objective with peatland restoration).
- Deliver a variety of other environmental benefits in support of the 25-Year Environment Plan objectives including:
 - Air quality: Achieve additional annual pollutant removal of 342 tonnes of PM₁₀; 174 tonnes of PM_{2.5}; 109 tonnes of SO₂; 119 tonnes of NH₃; 41 tonnes of NO₂; 2,123 tonnes of O₃.
 - Biodiversity: Deliver an additional £333 million in biodiversity benefits over the period 2020 to 2069.

- Recreation: Increase recreational visits to woods by 5.5 million visits per year (shared objective with peatland restoration).
- Improve people's access to nature for the benefit of people's physical and mental health and to develop visitor economies by ensuring activity close to where people live.
- Improve the future financial sustainability of woodland creation by supporting the development of green finance and markets to increase private investment in these nature-based solutions. Support further development of private investment to pay for and support the wider ecosystem services that trees can provide.
- Position the UK as a global leader on nature-based solutions to climate change, maximising ecosystem services from tree activity.

The additional funding from October 2021 was specifically allocated to support identified gaps in delivering the Government's ambition. This includes for example, additional funding to support increased capacity in the tree nursery sector and the forestry skills and workforce we will need for the future.

The England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) payment rate and 10-year payment period are based on the activity required to maintain newly created woodland during the years when such activity is most vital and intense. The current EWCO maintenance offer is deliberately aligned to payment rates and lengths in the Countryside Stewardship woodland schemes (now closed to new entrants) to follow the principle that we use consistent standard costs across Defra group grant offers. Defra and the Forestry Commission are aware of views from some stakeholders that a longer period of maintenance payments may encourage more planting and improved establishment rates plus give greater assurance of the longevity of the trees invested in by government, before Felling licence regulations apply. This will be taken into consideration in future reviews of maintenance payments. The maintenance payment rate was recently increased from £200 to £300 per hectare based on a reappraisal of the standard costs of maintenance activity which had increased since setting the rate previously.

EWCO offers Additional Payments for woodland designs that deliver additional public benefits such as recreational access or flood risk mitigation. Where other sources of funding may be available for a public benefit, applicants may choose not to apply for the additional contribution for this benefit and receive that alternative source of funding, again subject to the rules of that alternative source of funding.

These Additional Payments do not include carbon as funding for carbon is expected to come from private finance, such as the Woodland Carbon Code. The EWCO application process is designed to gather the information required to enable applicants to voluntarily register with the Woodland Carbon Code (WCC), which is needed to access private funding for 'Woodland Carbon Units' and to apply to the Woodland Carbon Guarantee (WCaG). If eligible, carbon payments are one form of private finance allowed under EWCO that could bridge the gap between maintenance payments ending and timber revenues starting.

As set out in the 2019 Green Finance Strategy, Defra aims to use public funds to leverage private investment into the projects, technologies and infrastructure which will deliver

Net Zero. We have committed to raising at least £500 million in private finance every year by 2027 to support nature recovery in England, which will include finance for projects focussed on woodland creation and management.

To support this work, Defra recently launched a Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund, which provides technical assistance and capacity-building funding for nature projects to become ready for private investment. These projects will form part of the project pipeline for the Big Nature Impact Fund (BNIF) which will finance nature-based projects selling ecosystem services by blending £30 million Defra investment with significant private investment. The majority of Defra funding for BNIF will be deployed into carbon-rich biodiverse habitats, chiefly woodland creation and peatland restoration, with a focus on native broadleaf woodlands.

Defra also plans to publish guidance in 2022 on how NCF tree planting schemes can access private finance markets for ecosystem services. Under the NCF, Defra undertakes an annual programme review which will include an assessment of the programme's ability to leverage green finance and to avoid crowding this out.

7/ Domestic Timber Action Plan

We therefore recommend Defra and BEIS publish, by September 2022, an action plan to increase the use of domestically grown timber in the UK. This action plan must have a clear economic focus providing guidance on what trees we should be growing to meet domestic demand. It should also contain annual milestones for the proportion of domestically grown timber used, with an aim to double the amount of domestically grown timber being used in the UK by 2030. (Paragraph 56)

The England Tree Action Plan sets out our proposals to support a thriving forest economy and encourage demand for UK-grown timber to reduce our carbon footprint from imports and replace more carbon-intensive materials.

We recognise the important role our commercial forests play in tackling climate change, supporting a green economic recovery, and levelling up rural areas but that the UK is still importing a significant amount of its timber (80%). Within this, we see timber in construction as a significant opportunity to increase demand for our home-grown timber. Timber can be used in both traditional and certain modern methods of construction in a wide range of commercial and residential settings.

The Government committed in the England Trees Action Plan (ETAP) and Net Zero Strategy (NZS) to increase the safe use of timber in construction, with low rise buildings the main opportunity area for growth.

We have established a cross-Government and cross-industry TiC policy roadmap working group to design a policy roadmap identifying key actions for Government, the construction sector, the timber sector, and academia to safely increase timber use in construction. It will report before the end of this Parliament. As part of this the working group will consider what impact increasing use of TiC will have on domestic timber supplies as well as considering appropriate targets for TiC. However, further research and scoping is needed to understand safety implications and the realistic supply of domestic timber in coming years.

The group will also support implementation of other commitments set out in the ETAP and NZS which relate to timber supply and consider further actions, in both the public sector and in the private sector, to enable more use of structural timber in line with Climate Change Commission recommendations. This includes providing £1.5 million financial support over the next three years to develop innovative timber products through the Forestry Innovation Fund and working with Homes England and other partners to explore ways to increase timber use in the delivery of housing programmes.

Delivering Tree Planting

9/ Tree Nursery and 10/ Wykeham Nursery

We also ask the Government to update us on progress establishing a confidential information sharing system with nurseries, and on the outcomes of the £1m invested via the tree production innovation fund. (Paragraph 64)

We believe that the Government should review the decision to close Wykeham nursery, given the need to maximise UK tree production and reduce our reliance on imports. (Paragraph 66)

In the past year £1 million has been made available through the Tree Production Innovation Fund (TPIF) to encourage the adoption of innovative technologies and ways of working in the nursery sector. TPIF is supporting a wide range of projects to overcome barriers in tree production, through increased germination and establishments rates, automation of labour-intensive processes, and development of sustainable weed control solutions. Forestry Commission have had a fantastic response to TPIF, receiving 31 applications in 2021 including collaborations between researchers, nurseries, seed suppliers and industry. TPIF recently reopened for a second round of applications, making an additional £1.4m available for this ground-breaking work.

In May, a new Tree Production Capital Grant (TPCG) opened for applications, providing capital support to nurseries and seed suppliers to modernise facilities, for example by adopting mechanisation and automation, and thereby improve the quantity, quality, diversity, and biosecurity of planting stock available for planting in England.

Following our ETAP commitment to explore new data sharing practices to help better plan for supply and demand in the sector, the Forestry Commission have now recruited a data specialist to facilitate a flow of information on plant supply and demand between Government, the nursery sector, and their customers.

The decision to close Wykeham followed a detailed review of Forestry England's operations, which led to concentrating tree seedling production at Delamere in Cheshire. This decision has been carefully considered by the Forestry England Board and will not have an impact on current or future tree planting ambitions nationally or by Forestry England. Forestry England's two nurseries exist primarily to supply trees for Forestry England. The nurseries also supply trees to the legacy organisations in Wales and Scotland which have been created in response to the devolution of state forest management in those countries. These sales are declining as Natural Resources Wales and Forestry and Land

Scotland move to procuring trees through public tender. The future supply from Delamere will provide excellent quality trees suitable for planting by Forestry England throughout England.

Delamere Nursery is home to the most advanced production systems in the UK Forest Nursery sector. Past investment in its glasshouse facility has allowed Forestry England to move toward a sustainable method of tree production, reducing inputs of water and pesticides while increasing efficiency of seed use. Further planned investment will increase outputs from the existing site and will further reduce reliance on labour. The developments in cell-grown tree production will support Forestry England in growing of a more diverse range of species. The system also enables trees to be transplanted on forest sites throughout much of the year, rather than limiting planting to the winter season.

The Wykeham site has been made available to lease by competitive tender. Bids will be evaluated, with those that indicate intention to grow trees being prioritised.

11/ Tree Health Import Controls

We recommend that Defra works with the Animal & Plant Health Agency to review the import controls are in place to ensure they prevent the spread of plant diseases and pests. The Government must ensure that all checks on imports of plants and trees are in place at the border from 1 July 2022. (Paragraph 71)

In April 2022, Defra and the Forestry Commission announced Biosecure Procurement Requirement Pilot, to combat the threat from pests and diseases and further strengthen UK biosecurity fulfilling its commitment set out with ETAP. This means that, from June 2022, applicants for funding under EWCO and the Future Farming Tree Health Pilot must commit to sourcing their trees from suppliers who are either accredited under the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme or who have passed a Ready to Plant assessment, as provided by Fera Science Ltd.

This pilot will enable suppliers to demonstrate that their operational practices comply with the industry benchmark Plant Health Management Standard. This Standard includes protocols which are key to developing a robust plant health management system and sets out practical requirements for suppliers to help protect the plant supply chain.

The threat of pests and disease is significant and growing as a result of globalisation and climate change. Introducing the Biosecure Procurement Requirement Pilot will address these risks to our biosecurity, minimise the net loss to our existing treescape, and serve to realise our long-term vision for our trees and woodlands.

As announced in April 2022 the UK will be delaying its additional import checks until the end of 2023. This will allow time for the UK to harness the benefits of digitisation, making the best use of available data and the latest technology to ensure we maintain and enhance our world class biosecurity standards. We will publish a Target Operating Model in the Autumn that will set out our new regime of border import controls and will target the end of 2023 as the revised date for delivering our controls regime

The UK has a strong, risk-based regulatory regime in place which implements a comprehensive range of government measures to minimise biosecurity risks to trees and meet World Trade Organisation standards. This includes a prohibition on the highest

risk trees and the phytosanitary certification of those which are permitted for import, to provide official confirmation that prescribed conditions have been complied with. Imports of the highest-risk plants and plant products must be pre-notified to government and are subject to an official inspection and surveillance programme. Plant passporting of all movements of trees, and regulated timber for commercial purposes, is required within GB.

Our border inspectors carry out around 70,000 physical checks of imported plants, including trees, each year and are highly effective. The training, assessment and ongoing re-evaluation of plant health inspectors is accredited under the ISO 17020 Standard which is underpinned by external audits from the UK Accreditation Service to ensure delivery of consistently reliable checks.

We have established mechanisms in place to manage new and emerging pest and disease threats, for example the recent emergency measures introduced to strengthen import controls against the Pine Processionary Moth. We also constantly review whether further safeguards are needed and have a scientific process to assess the changing threats to plant biosecurity. The UK Plant Health Risk Register contains details of over 1200 plant pests and pathogens, 30% of which can affect trees. Risks are reviewed monthly with Ministers and prioritised for action such as further regulation or increased inspections. Regulations associated with tree and plant imports are frequently reviewed and updated as part of this process. In the England Tree Action Plan, we committed to consult on additional biosecurity measures for high-risk tree species and commodities, and this review is currently under way as part of the consultation process for the new GB Plant Biosecurity Strategy. Further details on this will be published in the new GB Plant Biosecurity Strategy later this year.

12/ Skills & Workforce

We recommend that Defra commit to a target of bringing at least an extra three hundred new people into woodland creation roles by 2025. Defra should create a dedicated taskforce with membership from the Department for Education, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Forestry Commission and training providers, including land-based agricultural colleges, to agree and deliver a clear plan to meet this target. This taskforce should report back to us on its progress by October 2022. (Paragraph 79)

Through the Nature for Climate Fund, we have boosted resource in Defra, Forestry Commission, Natural England and with many charities and private partners. This workforce is designing and delivering schemes with landowners, businesses, charities and communities to increase woodland creation, sector capacity, education, and skills routes. Through this work Defra has and is already bringing significant numbers of people into woodland creation and other crucial roles in the sector.

In the ETAP, Defra committed to support apprenticeships, T Levels and other technical training routes into the forestry sector and develop higher technical and professional education routes, increasing the number of people in woodland creation roles outside of government. Defra is also supporting the Forestry Skills Forum with the development and delivery of the Forestry Skills Action Plan for England, which aims to promote education, skills, learning and development across the forestry sector.

Recently a new Forestry Commission Development Woodland Officer apprenticeship has launched jointly with the University of Cumbria and the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF). This is the first time that a degree-level forestry apprenticeship has been offered in the UK. The initial cohort will start in September 2022 and will complete a three-year, paid development opportunity to kickstart their careers in forestry.

Defra is working closely with Forestry Commission, the forestry sector, educators and other departments to support the development and expansion of the forestry workforce.

Defra is also a founding member of the Green Jobs Delivery Group alongside BEIS, DfE and DWP; specifically formed to be the central forum through which government, industry and other key stakeholders work together to ensure that the UK has the workforce needed to deliver a green industrial revolution.

13/ Seasonal Workers

We recommend that Defra and the Home Office work with the nursery sector to review the number of seasonal worker visas available and consider whether further visas, beyond the current 30,000 are needed now that additional sectors have joined the scheme. We also recommend that the length of the visa for tree nursery workers be extended from 6 to 9 months to reflect the working season of that sector. (Paragraph 82)

Defra is working closely with industry to help our world-leading growers access the labour they need for 2022 and beyond. On 24 December 2021, the Government announced that the Seasonal Worker Visa Route has been extended to 2024 to allow overseas workers to come to the UK for up to six months to harvest both edible and ornamental crops, bringing tree nursery workers into the scope of the scheme. 30,000 visas will be available in 2022. This will be kept under review with the potential to increase by 10,000 visas if necessary. We are interested to see how the scheme is used by the nursery sector.

While acknowledging the forestry industry's reliance on foreign workers, the UK is committed to becoming a high-skilled, high-wage economy and the Government has been clear that more must be done to attract UK workers through offering training, career options, wage increases and to invest in increased automation technology. The number of visas available will be tapered from 2023 to account for an increased focus on British workers and automation. Defra will bring forward further proposals in due course on ways to support the sector as well as progressing recommendations from the Review of Automation in Horticulture that was conducted last year and is due to be published soon. Defra is also working with industry and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to raise awareness of career opportunities within the horticulture sector among UK workers.

The Seasonal Worker Visa Route does not seek to provide all of the horticultural sector's required seasonal labour for 2022 and beyond. Increasing the visa length to 9 months presupposes the need for near fulltime employment, which runs counter to the scheme being seasonal only.

14/ EIA Approvals Process

We recommend that Defra consult on the criteria and process for its review of approvals regulations, which it should aim to conclude by December 2022. We further recommend that Defra set out what additional resources from the last Spending Review will be used to enable the Forestry Commission and Natural England to meet the additional work arising from the Government's planting ambition and provide the analysis it has undertaken to assure itself that the planned funding is sufficient. (Paragraph 91)

We are currently undertaking a Post Implementation Review (PIR) on the 2017 amendments to the Forestry Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This will include stakeholder views and will conclude mid-2022. The PIR will consider the implementation of the Forestry EIA and whether it meets the objective of enabling nature recovery and sustainable development. The conclusions of the PIR will inform any potential future reforms of the Forestry EIA. As set out in the Planning White Paper and the National Infrastructure Strategy, the Government is set to publish a new framework for Environmental Impact Assessments that provides clarity, removes duplication, and ensures environmental considerations are embedded effectively in EIA decision making at an early stage. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will give us the powers to bring this new system about.

Across the lifetime of the NCF Programme Natural England and Forestry Commission (including Forestry England) will receive £260.6m CDEL and £63.0m RDEL to support the delivery of tree programme – subject to annual review of programme delivery to maximise value for money.

This funding has undergone a robust business case approval process underpinned by extensive analysis and Impact Assessment work. This helped inform final decision making and ensures funding is sufficient to resource the regulatory provision necessary to meet rising demand due to increased planting activity.

15/ Permanency Rules

We recommend that Defra conducts an evidence-based review of the permanency rules and the impact they are having on tree-planting and consult on changes to the rules for new woodland creation. (Paragraph 97)

We are currently consulting on proposals to remove permanency requirements for certain forestry practices within the consultation on the Nature Recovery Green Paper published on 16th March 2022 and once the consultation closes on 27 June 2022, we will be reviewing the results of this.

We have previously received significant feedback from stakeholders that current government policy on the permanency of woodland is functioning as a blocker to planting, most notably in responses to the England Tree Strategy consultation, which informed the England Trees Action Plan. Stakeholder responses highlighted the need for greater flexibility on permanent land use change, with some respondents specifically suggesting that agroforestry and new woodland below a certain area threshold could be exempt from 'permanence' requirements.

We announced in the England Trees Action Plan that we would be investigating motivations, barriers, and engagement methods to expand tree and woodland cover. We are currently working to identify what further research into key planting blockers might be possible. Research into the effect of permanency rules on planting behaviour and the impact of possible policy changes on woodland creation rates are a significant part of this proposal.

16/ Tenancy Working Group

We recommend that Defra include within the new Tenancy Working Groups' remit how to find practical and equitable ways to enable more tenant farmers to contribute to England's tree-planting ambition. (Paragraph 102)

We agree with the recommendation and have included this within the remit of the Tenancy Working Group (TWG) Defra has reviewed feedback from tenants on the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) and has revised the grant manual, updated its application process and is currently reviewing ways to transfer EWCO agreement to the next tenant. These actions have been presented and welcomed by Baroness Rock, Chair of the TWG, and the Tenant Farmers Association (TFA). Tree planting is one of the main areas the TWG are looking at and we will look forward to hearing what the TWG recommends. Defra is also continuing to work with the Tenancy Reform Industry Group (TRIG) to find practical and achievable ways to enable more tenant farmers to contribute to England's tree-planting ambition.