



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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From the Chair of the Committee

The Rt Hon Lord Zac Goldsmith
Minister for Pacific and the Environment
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
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13 July 2021

Possible closure of the Forestry Commission's Wykeham nursery

As you will be aware, the EFRA Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the Government's tree planting and woodland creation targets and their contribution to reaching net zero by 2050. Given this, and especially the evidence we have already received on potential shortages of nursery capacity and skilled workers, I wanted to write to you about the possible closure of the Forestry Commission's Wykeham nursery in North Yorkshire in 2022.

It would therefore be very helpful if you could provide the Committee with an overview of the current situation relating to this particular nursery, and how the decision to close it has been reached? The Committee would also appreciate answers to the following questions:

Q1 Whether it will leave enough UK-based nursery capacity to deliver the seeds and saplings which are needed to reach the UK-target of creating 30,000 hectares a year of new woodland by 2025, and for England to aim to "at least treble woodland creation by the end of this Parliament", as set out in the England Trees Action Plan (ETAP)? The latter says it will ensure there is enough planting stock to meet demand, by working with public and private sector nurseries. Our inquiry has heard evidence from the nursery sector and others, however, that existing nursery capacity may not, as it stands, be able to deliver within the timeframe set out by the Government. If the Wykeham site is closed this will leave just one remaining public sector nursery at Delamere in Cheshire.

Q2 How the closure will mitigate the need to rely more on imported seeds and saplings for tree planting? The ETAP says the Government will fund and work with UK public and private sector nurseries to improve the supply and biosecurity of domestic tree production. Our inquiry has heard evidence, however, that any shortfall will have to be made up through imports, which risks importing pests and diseases. We would be concerned if the closure of Wykeham led to a reduction in capacity and increased biosecurity risks.

Q3 How the closure will affect the level of trained, experienced and skilled staff within the nursery, forestry and woodland management sectors? Our inquiry has also heard evidence that the lack of a skilled workforce in the public and private sectors is a key barrier to achieving the UK's tree planting objectives. The joint submission we received from Defra and the Forestry Commission acknowledged the skills shortage, and the ETAP says it will "build a bigger skilled workforce" through various measures to improve education, training and apprenticeships for people entering into and within the sector and to support their employers. The potential loss of skilled workers through redundancies at Wykeham would appear to run counter to this ambition.

Successfully delivering on the tree planting and woodland creation targets is going to be key to reaching net zero, so we hope you can reassure us that the decision to close the Wykeham nursery has been made in a joined-up way and will not hold us back in meeting these our objectives.

I would be grateful for an answer by 31 July.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Parish', followed by a long, horizontal, sweeping flourish that extends to the right.

Neil Parish
Chair of the Committee