



House of Commons  
Environment, Food and Rural  
Affairs Committee

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# Tree planting

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## Third Report of Session 2021–22

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 8 March 2022*

## The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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## Summary

The UK Government has set a UK wide target to create 30,000 hectares of new woodland every year by 2025 and committed to treble the amount of woodland created in England in this Parliament. These efforts are key to the UK's net zero, biodiversity and nature recovery objectives. This inquiry has examined whether the Government has the plans, systems and tools in place to achieve its ambitions. Our key findings are:

- We welcome the Government's ambition on woodland creation. However, it will be a steep climb for England to treble its planting rates in the next two years. The Government needs to set annual targets for England's contribution to the UK target to provide certainty to the sector.
- New woodland creation must deliver the principle of planting the 'right tree in the right place'. This can only be delivered if proper mapping data is available to inform planting decisions. By May 2022, Defra, the Forestry Commission and Natural England must set out a plan to complete their data mapping.
- The interim English Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) provides better incentives than previously existed. However, there is a lack of clarity about what long term funding for planting and maintaining woodland will be available under the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes. Defra and the Forestry Commission must set out how EWCO and ELM will fit together and consult on whether the incentives will support an economically viable business model for woodland management.
- It is not clear whether the Government has allocated enough funding to support tree-planting and woodland management. By September 2022, Defra and HM Treasury must set out what level of planting can be achieved with the current funding levels and create a plan to bridge the gap that exists between this and its planting ambition.
- Increasing the amount of domestic timber the UK uses is essential for the long-term economic viability of woodlands, whilst also storing carbon and reducing our reliance on imported wood. Defra needs to produce a clear, economically focussed action plan which will double the amount of domestically produced timber the UK consumes and provide guidance on what trees the sector should grow to meet domestic demand.
- Defra must work together with the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the nursery sector to support UK tree nurseries to expand production to enable it to supply the number of trees needed to meet the Government's planting ambition. While imports can make up any shortfall in the short term, it also risks pests and diseases being introduced. Defra and the Animal & Plant Health Agency should review import controls on trees entering the country to minimise this risk.
- Defra and the Forestry Commission must address the shortfall of skilled workers, particularly in woodland creation roles. Defra should commit to 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.

# 1 Introduction

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1. Tree planting is a key part of the Government's plan to combat climate change and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.<sup>1</sup> This was stressed by the Prime Minister in his speech to the United Nations (UN) in the run-up to COP26,<sup>2</sup> and by the Government's *Net Zero Strategy*. In addition to removing carbon emissions from the atmosphere, tree planting also delivers a wider range of additional environmental benefits including supporting greater biodiversity, nature recovery and flood risk management.<sup>3</sup>
2. The UK Government has committed to accelerate tree planting, with a UK target of 30,000 hectares of new woodland being created every year by 2025.<sup>4</sup> For England, the Government has committed to treble the amount of woodland created in the current Parliament, for which it has committed up to £750 million of funding between 2020 and 2025.<sup>5</sup>
3. We launched our inquiry into Tree Planting and Woodlands in October 2020 focusing on the following key issues:<sup>6</sup>
  - Are the UK Government's targets for increasing forestry coverage, and tree planting, for England and the UK sufficiently ambitious and realistic?
  - Are the right structures in place to ensure that the UK wide target for increasing forestry coverage is delivered?
  - Why were previous ambitions for increasing tree planting in England not met and what lessons should be learned?
  - Are the right policies and funding in place to appropriately protect and manage existing woodlands in England? How will prospective changes to policy and legislation effect this?

We received over 90 written submissions and held five oral evidence sessions, with researchers, the forestry and tree nursery industry, skills and training bodies, local government, charities, farming and landowning organisations and the Government. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to our inquiry.

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1 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, Summary for Policymakers](#) (October 2018); Climate Change Committee [Net Zero: The UK's contribution to stopping global warming](#) (May 2019), p31

2 COP26 was the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties held in Glasgow from 31 October to 13 November 2021

3 Climate Change Committee, [Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) (November 2018), p39. Climate Change Committee, [Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) (November 2018), p22; HM Government [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#) (January 2018) pp6–10

4 Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [England Tree Strategy Consultation](#) (June 2020), p6

5 HM Government, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), (October 2020) p26; UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p10. HM Government, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), (October 2020) p176; HM Treasury, [Policy Paper: Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021](#) (October 2021). The Government initially committed to spend £500 million between 2020 and 2025, but the Net Zero Strategy and the 2021 Autumn Budget and Spending Review announced an increase in spending to £750m by 2025 from the Nature for Climate Fund for peat restoration, woodland creation and management.

6 Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Forest focus: can the Government deliver on tree-planting targets? MPs launch new inquiry](#), October 2020

4. We welcome the Government's ambitions for tree planting, however during this inquiry we repeatedly heard that the Government is not making fast enough progress to meet its targets. Our report looks at the plans, systems and tools the Government needs to put in place to realise its goals ambitions.

- Chapter 2 looks at the UK tree planting target, the gap between this target and current performance, whether a specific target is needed for England's contribution, and how to ensure the 'right trees are planted in the right place'.
- Chapter 3 looks at how the Government can provide better financial incentives that can make it economically viable to plant and manage woodland. It also looks at options for promoting domestic timber production and consumption which could provide greater commercial incentives to grow trees whilst reducing timber imports and the UK's contribution to overseas deforestation.
- Chapter 4 looks at how the Government's tree planting commitment can be delivered. This includes the supply of new trees, the capacity of the workforce to plant and look after them and possible regulatory steps the Government could take to encourage more planting.

## 2 Tree planting targets

### The UK tree planting target and ambition to treble tree planting in England

5. In 2018, the Climate Change Committee (CCC)<sup>7</sup> advised that UK tree cover should be increased from 13% to 17–19% of the UK’s land area, to capture and store more carbon from the atmosphere as part of the Government’s effort to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.<sup>8</sup> This would require UK tree planting rates to rise to between 30–50,000 hectares per year<sup>9</sup> and stay at this level until 2050 to reach the predicted necessary contribution to net zero.<sup>10</sup> The Government has committed to a UK-wide target of creating 30,000 hectares a year of new woodland by 2025.<sup>11</sup> The Devolved Nations have set their own woodland creation targets, with Scotland being committed to plant 18,000 hectares a year by 2024–25, Wales to plant 2,000 hectares a year from 2020 onwards, and Northern Ireland to plant 900 hectares a year from 2020 to 2030.<sup>12</sup> The UK Government has not yet set out a clear and definitive target for England’s contribution to the UK target, but has instead stated the following:

- In 2020, Defra’s England Tree Strategy consultation suggested a possible limit of 10,000 hectares of new woodland being planted a year in England.<sup>13 14</sup>
- In 2021, The England Trees Action Plan set an aim “to at least treble woodland creation rates”, when just over 2,000 hectares were planted in England,<sup>15</sup> and to show how England will meet its contribution to the existing UK total tree-planting target to plant 30,000 hectares a year by the end of this Parliament.<sup>16</sup> The Plan stated that “England will have at least 12% woodland cover by mid-century”.<sup>17</sup>

7 Formerly the Committee on Climate Change

8 Climate Change Committee, [Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) (November 2018), p61; Climate Change Committee [Net Zero: The UKs contribution to stopping global warming](#) (May 2019), pp148 and 156. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, Summary for Policymakers](#) (October 2018), said global emissions will have to halve by 2030 and reach ‘net zero’ by 2050. This will mean total emissions are “equal to or less than the emissions we remove from the environment”, see [Net zero emissions: A new UK climate change target?](#), House of Commons Library, October 2018

9 It would involve between 1,000 and 2,500 trees being planted per hectare, BBC News, [General election 2019: How many trees can you plant?](#) (November 2019)

10 Climate Change Committee, [Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) (November 2018), p61; Climate Change Committee [Net Zero: The UKs contribution to stopping global warming](#) (May 2019), pp148 and 156

11 Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [England Tree Strategy Consultation](#) (June 2020), p6

12 [Woodland Creation, POSTnote 636](#), Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, January 2021, p2

13 Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [England Tree Strategy Consultation](#) (June 2020), p6

14 Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [England Tree Strategy Consultation - Technical Annex](#) (June 2020), p4

15 Forest Research, [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021), p55

16 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p10

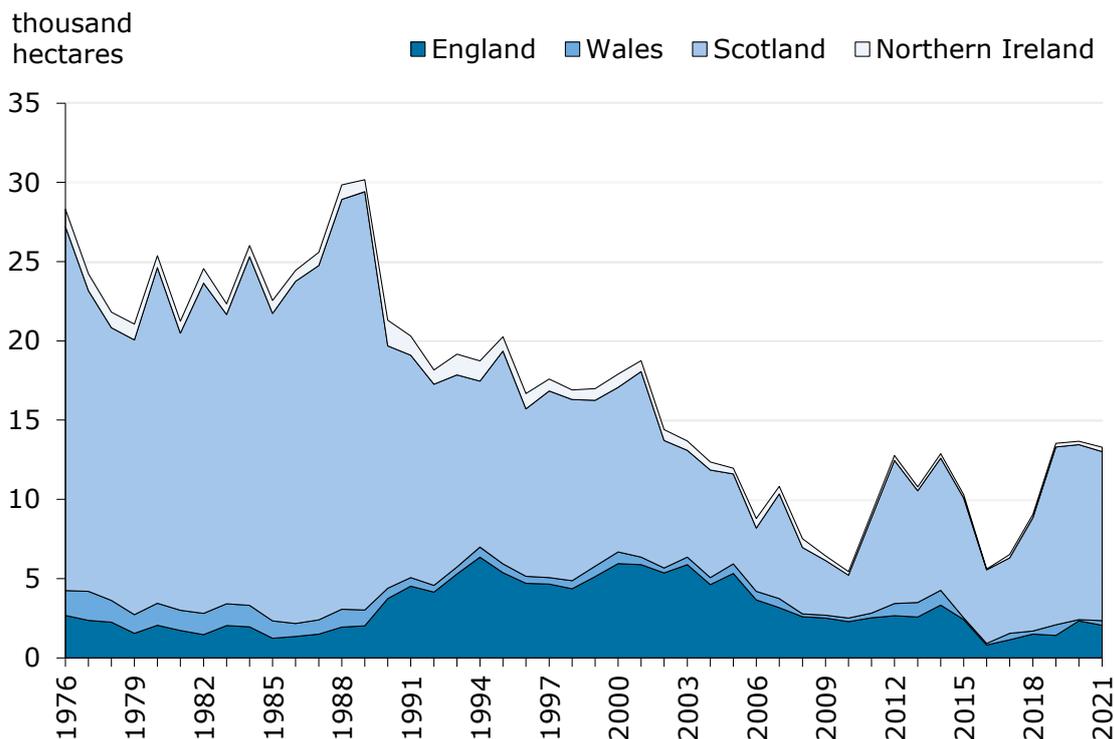
17 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p6

- The *Net Zero Strategy* which the Government submitted to the UN under the Paris Agreement restated the ambition to treble tree planting in England and to at least maintain this level from 2025 onwards.<sup>18</sup>
- The 2021 Autumn Budget and Spending Review said England would see at least 7,500 hectares a year of new planting by 2025.<sup>19</sup>

### Historic trends and current progress

6. As Figure 1 shows, during the 1970s and 1980s, annual tree planting in the UK was between 20–30,000 hectares a year but then fell steadily because of concerns about the environmental and landscape impacts of new plantations.<sup>20</sup> By the late 2000s, planting stood at just above 5,000 hectares per year, before recovering in the following decade. By 2020–21, UK planting amounted to around 13,000 hectares and a little over 2,000 hectares in England.<sup>21</sup> Woodland creation is concentrated in Scotland, which has 1.5 million (m) (47%) of the UK's 3.2m hectares of woodland, compared to 1.3 million hectares (41%) in England, 0.3 million hectares (9%) in Wales and 0.1 million hectares (3%) in Northern Ireland.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 1: New tree planting in the UK, 1976–2021



Source: Forest Research, [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021), p55

18 HM Government, *Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener*, (October 2020) p168. The strategy was submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the UK's second Long-Term Low Greenhouse Gas Emission Development Strategy under the Paris Agreement, see United Nations Climate Change, [Communication of long-term strategies](#) (accessed 11 January 2022)

19 HM Treasury, *Policy Paper: Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021* (October 2021)

20 The Flow Country, *Restoring the Flows*, accessed 2 December 2021

21 Forest Research, [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021), p55. All four UK nations saw fluctuations between 2019 and 2021; but it is unclear what impact the pandemic might have had.

22 Forest Research, [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021), p16.

7. Current performance means there will need to be a rapid increase in planting rates to reach the UK target of 30,000 hectares of new woodland being created a year by 2025, and to ‘treble’ England’s planting rate in this Parliament.<sup>23</sup>

### **Views on the tree planting target**

8. We heard a range of views about the current tree-planting target. Some groups wanted the UK Government to be more ambitious for England’s contribution to the UK target. Confor, the commercial forestry body, said England should plant 7,000–8,000 hectares a year by 2024–5.<sup>24</sup> The National Trust said the tree cover target for England alone should be 30,000 hectares of woodlands a year from 2025 to 2050.<sup>25</sup> Friends of the Earth criticised the lack of an England target and what it saw as the UK Government relying on the Devolved Governments to achieve the overall goal. It wanted a target “to double England’s woodland cover”, from 10% to 20% by 2050.<sup>26</sup>

9. Others welcomed the target whilst cautioning that the pace of change required to reach it would be challenging. Professor Ian Bateman, Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute at University of Exeter Business School, told us the 30,000 hectares a year target by 2025 was in line with historical maximum planting rates in the 1970s, but “the speed of this transition [was] extremely ambitious.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) told us the UK target was “only realistic if there is real change across Government.”<sup>28</sup> Other organisations questioned whether it was realistic to set a target and ambition without first sorting out key issues including the economic incentives needed to encourage tree planting, the supply of trees and workforce and skills issues, which we will return to in Chapters 3 and 4.<sup>29</sup>

10. Some groups expressed concerns about the Government focusing too much on tree-planting numbers rather than the overall environmental goals that tree-planting was meant to deliver. The National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), the UK Environmental Law Association and Forest of Selwood Community Interest Company, all said that woodland creation must be focussed as much on biodiversity and nature recovery as net zero, otherwise natural habitats and protected landscapes could be harmed.<sup>30</sup> The Woodland Trust called for legislation to address the quality and quantity of tree-planting, as just focusing on tree ‘numbers’ was simplistic. It argued that the target needed to support not just net zero and commercial timber, but the “full range of social, economic and environmental benefits”, including nature recovery and the quality of life in towns and cities.<sup>31</sup>

11. In contrast, the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) and the Tenant Farmers Association (TFA) called for a clearer justification for the UK-target and for full consideration to be

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23 Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, [Section 1](#)

24 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 1.9

25 National Trust ([TPW0031](#)) para 6

26 Friends of the Earth ([TPW0016](#)) paras 13 and 16; Forest Research, [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021), p16

27 Prof Ian Bateman ([TPW0030](#)) paras 1–3

28 Institute of Chartered Foresters ([TPW0036](#)) para 5

29 Royal Horticultural Society ([TPW0040](#)) para 15; The Birmingham Institute of Forest Research ([TPW0045](#)) para 11; [Qq102-03](#) [Jen Turner, of the Royal Forestry Society]

30 National Association of AONBs, and Forest of Bowland AONB ([TPW0069](#)) para 3; UK Environmental Law Association ([TPW0055](#)) paras 1–2; Forest of Selwood Community Interest Company ([TPW0081](#)) para 9

31 The Woodland Trust ([TPW0056](#)) paras 9, 15 and 24

given to the potential trade-offs in land-use.<sup>32</sup> The NFU told us that “taking land out of agricultural production” to plant trees “risks reducing domestic food supply and importing food from overseas to compensate”, that might have been produced to “lower environmental standards” than in the UK.<sup>33</sup> George Dunn, CEO of the TFA agreed, adding that imports could have a “higher carbon base” than UK produced food, but which could also lead to tenant farmers losing land and making their businesses “less resilient”, so he stressed that we should not “rush headlong into tree planting without considering the implications”.<sup>34</sup>

### **A target for England**

12. We heard strong calls, particularly from the sectors that will be relied upon to deliver on tree planting, for the UK Government to set a target for England to give a clear direction on policy. The Country Land & Business Association (CLA) said England needs a tree planting target and effective UK-wide co-ordination to reach the UK target.<sup>35</sup> Responding to the England Trees Action Plan, Confor called for clear milestones to the end of 2024 to keep the Government “on track” as past targets had been missed.<sup>36</sup> The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA), the trade body for the ornamental horticulture sector said the Plan’s success depended on “full confidence in the market place”, as “a lack of detail and uncertainty” would mean nurseries would not produce new trees, and it called on the Government to “be more definitive” by setting the targets in law.<sup>37</sup> Friends of the Earth stressed that whilst an England target would set “a clear overarching goal”, for nurseries, landowners, foresters and civil society to work to, it was also “essential for accountability” to enable civil society and the public to “monitor the government’s progress”.<sup>38</sup>

13. Lord Goldsmith, the Minister for forestry policy, told us the Government preferred not to “have a year-on-year target” for England as it was “trying new things” and “year-on-year targets” might discourage the Government from experimenting or innovating for fear of missing those targets.”<sup>39</sup> He said, “the freedom to innovate, but within the context of having to meet the overall UK target”, by the end of the Parliament would “deliver the best results.”<sup>40</sup> The Minister speculated that England’s “share” of the UK target (30,000 hectares a year by 2025) was “at least” 7,000 hectares a year and would “hopefully” rise to 10,000 hectares a year.<sup>41</sup> We were told this is “a trajectory” which is expected to rise “steeply” from 2,000 hectares in 2020/21, to 2,500 hectares in 2021/22 and then continue upwards to 7,000 or near to 10,000 hectares by 2024.<sup>42</sup>

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32 [Q185](#) [Tom Bradshaw]; [Q187](#) [George Dunn]

33 National Farmers’ Union ([TPW0035](#)) para 6

34 [Q188](#) [George Dunn]

35 CLA [TPW0059](#) paras 18 and 36

36 Confor, [Trees Action Plan must set milestones to increase planting and wood supply](#), accessed 3 December 2021

37 The Horticultural Trades Association, [HTA responds to Defra’s England Trees Action Plan](#), accessed 3 December 2021

38 Friends of the Earth ([TPW0016](#)) paras 9–10

39 [Q239](#)

40 [Q239](#)

41 [Q239](#)

42 [Q246](#) [Lord Goldsmith]; [Q247](#) [Edward Barker]; [Q251](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

14. We welcome the UK Government’s ambition to plant 30,000 hectares of new woodland a year by 2025 in the UK. However, the Government has not set a clear target for England’s contribution, which will likely require England to treble its planting rate by May 2024. Setting annual targets for tree planting in England would provide certainty for the sectors whilst improving transparency and accountability. *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.*

## Right tree in the right place

15. To realise the benefit of tree planting, it is essential that the ‘right tree in the right place’ principle is followed. Much of the evidence we received highlighted the environmental risks of planting trees in the wrong place. For example, the James Hutton Institute told us that planting on peat soils can release much more carbon than a tree will store in its life.<sup>43</sup> The RSPB is still carrying out ‘forest-to-bog’ peatland restoration in areas like the Flow Country, in northern Scotland, to reverse the impact of inappropriate planting.<sup>44</sup> Another risk is planting trees on priority habitats which can undermine biodiversity recovery efforts. For example, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust raised concerns that a recent increase in planting in Scotland had been at the cost of semi-natural grassland habitats for several bird species of high conservation concern.<sup>45</sup> Also converting farmland to trees can displace food production, potentially leading to higher carbon emissions from food imports produced to lower environmental standards.<sup>46</sup>

16. However Natural England told us that there is a lack of up-to-date and comprehensive mapping that can be used to inform decisions and prevent inappropriate planting,<sup>47</sup> which it identified as a risk to the “right tree in the right place” principle.<sup>48</sup> It referred, as did others, to recent tree planting on priority habitats in Cumbria and the Chilterns, as instances of where a lack of data had led to inappropriate planting.<sup>49</sup> Natural England called for “immediate investment” to ensure datasets are fit for purpose.<sup>50</sup>

## Work to improve mapping

17. The England Trees Action Plan contains the following measures aimed to improve mapping, although no timeline has been set for their delivery:

- Improving the Forestry Commission woodland creation map to better show low-risk areas for woodland creation and including “additional sensitivities” when “new information becomes available”.

43 The James Hutton Institute ([TPW0041](#)) paras 11–12

44 RSPB ([TPW0064](#)) para 9 and 15; RSPB, *From conifer plantation to blanket bog: Peatland restoration in the Flow Country* (accessed 8 December 2021)

45 The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust ([TPW0047](#)) para 3

46 National Farmers’ Union ([TPW0035](#))

47 Natural England ([TPW0024](#)) para 10

48 Natural England ([TPW0024](#)) para 10

49 Natural England ([TPW0024](#)) para 10; UK Environmental Law Association ([TPW0055](#)) para 16; Ancient Tree Forum ([TPW0066](#)) para 26; *Lake District peatland tree planting branded ‘heartbreaking’*, BBC News, 17 December 2020; HM Government Blog: Defra in the media, [Channel 4 on planting on peat bogs](#), 9 December 2020

50 Natural England ([TPW0024](#)) para 1

- Developing new mapping and spatial datasets to give land managers “more clarity” about “site sensitivities and opportunities for woodland establishment and management”, and
- Developing the evidence base on how and where to expand woodland and what tree species to plant.<sup>51</sup>

18. Joint evidence from Defra and the Forestry Commission also highlighted the role of new local authority-led Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), which are being introduced across England under the Environment Act, to identify “opportunities and priorities” to enhance biodiversity and support climate change mitigation or adaptation.<sup>52</sup> These strategies are intended to help developers and planning authorities “avoid the most valuable existing habitat and focus habitat creation or improvement where it will achieve the best outcomes.”<sup>53</sup> The Act also requires the Environment Secretary to publish a national habitat map for England to assist local authorities to develop their LNRS, identifying ‘off-limits’ national conservation sites or areas very important for biodiversity which must be avoided, and they must inform any authority of relevant local sites in their area.<sup>54</sup>

19. The UK Environmental Law Association told us that the Government must ensure that a consistent approach is taken to mapping to enable proper join-up between the Government’s tree planting, nature and peatland strategies.<sup>55</sup> It also said this mapping work should provide the basis for “a politically clear level of ambition” from the Government which it can translate into “deliverable policy”; but it stressed that unless the Government sets out a “coherent narrative” about which areas are inappropriate for tree planting, there would not be a clear “blueprint” for the delivery of local biodiversity priorities under the LNRS.<sup>56</sup>

20. We asked Natural England and the Forestry Commission how they are going to address gaps in data and if their work would be completed in time to support delivery of the ambition to treble planting by 2024. They told us they were improving the quality, accuracy and accessibility of national data, and had provided survey briefs to enable landowners and managers to conduct proper surveys of habitats or birds. However, they did not have specific completion dates for improving their data.<sup>57</sup>

21. Defra’s written evidence stated that the Forestry Commission and Natural England’s work to address gaps in data and mapping was “and ongoing ongoing process of making the best available data more accessible” and adding new data as it becomes available.<sup>58</sup> It also said the Commission’s ‘Low Risk Land Map for Woodland Creation’ had been used to identify 3.2 million hectares of “low-risk land” so far, and further updates would exclude “all peaty soils and priority areas for upland breeding wader populations”.<sup>59</sup>

51 UK Government, *The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024*, (May 2021) p16 and 35

52 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission (TPW0050) paras 24 and 82; Environment Act 2021, [Section 104](#); Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Policy paper, September 2021: Nature and conservation covenants \(parts 6 and 7\)](#) (accessed 8 December 2021)

53 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission (TPW0050) paras 24 and 82; Environment Act 2021, [Section 104](#); Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Policy paper, September 2021: Nature and conservation covenants \(parts 6 and 7\)](#) (accessed 8 December 2021)

54 Environment Act 2021, [Section 107](#)

55 UK Environmental Law Association (TPW0055) para 3

56 UK Environmental Law Association (TPW0055) para 3

57 [Q233](#) [Tony Juniper and Alan Law]; [Q234](#) [Steph Rhodes]

58 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [\[TPW0093\]](#) para 1.2

59 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [\[TPW0093\]](#) para 1.3–4

22. We raised with Defra whether the Forestry Commission and Natural England would have “adequate mapping tools” in time to support the Government’s tree planting goals. Edward Barker, Defra Director for Natural Environment, for Trees and Landscapes told us that both organisations had “not said” that it was not possible to meet the Government’s trajectory for tree planting—for this year at least - because of gaps in data and mapping.<sup>60</sup> Mr Barker also said he was hopeful that work on the national habitat map and LNRS would be completed in time to support delivery of the UK tree planting target.<sup>61</sup> The Minister acknowledged though, that in future there will be a “grey area where whether or not land can be planted is less straightforward.”<sup>62</sup>

**23. The Government’s planting ambition will fail to achieve its net zero, nature recovery and biodiversity goals unless it is able to deliver the principle of planting the ‘right tree in the right place’. This requires adequate mapping data available being available to inform planting decisions. Currently there is no clear delivery date to work by the Forestry Commission and Natural England to fill gaps in their data, or for the work on the new national habitat map and Local Nature Recovery Areas (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.**

**24. However additional mapping information will not, in itself, help local authorities manage the potential trade-offs between tree planting, creating and conserving other habitats and the needs of farmers and food production when developing Local Nature Recovery Strategies. 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.**

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60 [Q261](#) [Edward Barker]

61 [Q265](#) [Edward Barker]

62 [Q262](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

### 3 Incentivising tree planting

25. In this chapter we look at the incentives that the Government should use to ensure the economic viability of woodland planting and management and to sustain it at the scale require to meet tree-planting targets. It also looks at other measures to increase commercial incentives to grow trees such as promoting domestic timber production and consumption.

#### Incentives to plant trees and woodland

26. Many respondents said that low subsidies for tree planting compared to farming have been a key barrier to dedicating land to growing woodland. Professor Ian Bateman, University of Exeter Business School, told us that past tree planting targets were missed because “grant aided forestry cannot compete with subsidised agriculture for land” in the UK.<sup>63</sup>

27. The funding landscape for farming and land management in England is changing, which could present an opportunity to change the subsidies for tree planting. The key changes are summarised below:

- **Basic Payments, the fixed payments for owning agricultural land, made under the EU Common Agricultural Policy will be phased out by 2027.**<sup>64</sup>
- **They are being replaced by the Government’s new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes** which will pay farmers and land managers to deliver public good such as carbon storage, flood prevention, better biodiversity, and improved water, soil, and air quality.<sup>65</sup> Natural England have argued that this change may make converting farmland to woodland more attractive.<sup>66</sup>
- **In June 2021, The England Trees Action Plan launched the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) as a “precursor” to ELM.** This provides grant funding for a range of woodland creation, with higher payments for woodlands providing public goods, and a single application process for planting and maintenance payments.<sup>67</sup>
- **After 2024, existing tree planting schemes will be rolled into the Government’s ELM schemes.** The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery schemes will become the “main delivery mechanism” for publicly funded woodland creation and management.<sup>68</sup>

63 Prof Ian Bateman (TPW0030) paras 8–9

64 Basic Payments will be progressively reduced between 2021 and 2027, but only those until 2024 have so far been announced. The Rural Payments Agency has said the money saved by this reduction “will be invested back into new schemes to support farming and the countryside, such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive and the Farming Investment Fund,” *Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) 2021* (August 2020).

65 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Rural Payments Agency, *Guidance: Environmental Land Management schemes: overview* (accessed 20 December 2021); UK Government, *The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024*, (May 2021) p11

66 Natural England (TPW0024) para 13

67 UK Government, *The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024*, (May 2021) pp10–12; Forestry Commission *Guidance: England Woodland Creation Offer* (accessed 20 December 2021)

68 UK Government, *The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024*, (May 2021) p12

- **The pilot phase of the SFI includes a farm woodland “standard” pilot** which makes annual payments of £49 per hectare of woodland, but only involves a small number of land managers. Information about the details of the SFI, and other schemes that will form part of ELM, is limited.<sup>69</sup>
- **The England Trees Action Plan said the EWCO will “ensure a smooth transition”** between schemes. It aims to ensure that participants that are creating new woodland now “will not be unfairly disadvantaged” when new schemes go live, with payments being higher in this Parliament to encourage more planting as soon as possible.<sup>70</sup>

28. Witnesses told us that EWCO, and the ELM scheme that replaces it, must provide a viable economic model so that farmers and landowners can see it is “commercially attractive” for them to start planting woodland.<sup>71</sup> The Country Land and Business Association (CLA) told us that incentives will have to counteract both the income being lost with the withdrawal of Basic Payments and any perceived loss in value from a change in land-use to tree planting, if they are to tempt enough landowners away from “more profitable land uses”.<sup>72</sup> The NFU told us the incentives must “reflect a fair price” to fully compensate for the long-term responsibility of planting trees to deliver public goods. They also called on the Government to prioritise voluntary opportunities for farmers, that offer “a diversified business decision with a clear financial benefit”.<sup>73</sup> Professor Bateman expressed this more bluntly, when he told us that, “landowners and farmers rely upon the income from their land to survive. With many farms already strapped for cash, forestry will have to pay its way if we are to deliver its potential contribution to net zero.”<sup>74</sup> He continued that “if the financial returns to woodland were to change then [...] there is no reason to suspect that the land sector would not deliver the woodland we need.” He said research he had led at Exeter University involving nearly 2,000 farms showed “[an] enthusiasm for engaging in farm forestry if only the financial conditions were right.”<sup>75</sup>

29. The EWCO has received a broadly positive reaction from stakeholders,<sup>76</sup> being seen as more generous than previously available incentives for woodland creation.<sup>77</sup> It will cover capital costs up to £8,500 per hectare for tree planting, with extra payments if the planting provides additional benefits. These extra payments could result in over £10,000 being paid for every hectare that is planted.<sup>78</sup> This compares favourably to the main subsidy for tree planting under the Countryside Stewardship scheme, which was capped at £6,800 per hectare for 2021.<sup>79</sup>

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69 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Rural Payments Agency and Forestry Commission, [Guidance: Farm woodland standard of the Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot](#) (accessed 20 December 2021)

70 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p12

71 Institute of Chartered Foresters ([TPW0036](#)) para 14

72 CLA ([TPW0059](#)) para 24

73 The National Farmers’ Union ([TPW0035](#)) paras 3 and 18

74 Prof Ian Bateman ([TPW0030](#)) para 10

75 Prof Ian Bateman ([TPW0030](#)) para 10

76 [Q66](#); [Caroline Ayre]; [Q103](#) [Shireen Chambers]; [Q195](#) [Tom Bradshaw]; [Q192](#) [Judicaelle Hammond, George Dunn]

77 [Q192](#) [Judicaelle Hammond, George Dunn]; [Q195](#) [Tom Bradshaw]

78 Forestry Commission, [Guidance: England Woodland Creation Offer](#) (accessed 31 January 2022). Additional payments are available for: nature recovery, up to £2,800 per ha; flood risk, £500 per ha; water quality, £400 per ha; for woodlands along riverbanks that improve water habitat, £1,600 per ha; for creating woodlands close to where people live, up to £500 per ha; and recreational access, up to £2,200 per ha.

79 Rural Payments Agency, [Countryside Stewardship: Woodland Creation and Maintenance grant manual \(from 9 February 2021\)](#) (accessed 31 January 2022).

30. However, the EWCO is only a temporary scheme,<sup>80</sup> and we heard concerns about how the EWCO and ELM will fit together.<sup>81</sup> The CLA told us that the process of developing the ELM scheme was “frustratingly slow” and that without more reliable detail on how woodland fits in to ELM, the planting targets would “get off to a slow start.”<sup>82</sup> The CLA’s Director of Policy & Advice, Judicaelle Hammond, told us this “lack of clarity” made it very difficult for businesses to plan given their seven to 10-year planning horizons.<sup>83</sup> Shireen Chambers of the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) told us she could not yet see how ELM would “link to nature recovery, biodiversity net gain and countryside stewardship”.<sup>84</sup> George Dunn, Tenant Farmers Association (TFA), said the TFA’s discussions with Defra gave the impression that EWCO had been “created in its own silo”.<sup>85</sup> Caroline Ayre, Confor, was more positive, saying that whilst the development ELM was “a long, convoluted process” she was encourage that EWCO was “dipping its toe” into paying for public goods, and hope that this approach would “segue nicely” into ELM.<sup>86</sup>

31. We have previously considered the impact the uncertainty about ELM is having on farmers in its recent report on ELM and the agricultural transition.<sup>87</sup> We heard these concerns again during this inquiry, with the NFU’s Tom Bradshaw telling us: “It is all well and good having the woodland creation offer in one place” but there’s a need for a “clear, coherent vision of where they are heading” to allow farmers to evaluate the different options available to them.<sup>88</sup> George Dunn of the TFA explained that the end of CAP basic payments would result in tenant farmers seeking out other economic opportunities,<sup>89</sup> but noted there were specific barriers to participation in tree planting schemes.<sup>90</sup> These are discussed further in Chapter 4.

32. Steph Rhodes, the Forestry Commission’s Delivery Director for the England Tree Planting Programme, told us the EWCO would create a “good incentive for farmers”, and that the Commission had spent a lot of time using economic modelling to try and “pitch the offer right”.<sup>91</sup> We asked Lord Goldsmith how the Government was addressing concerns about ELM’s slow development and lack of clarity, and its potential implication for the Government’s tree planting ambition. The Minister told us they had written many times to “reassure” landowners that they would not be worse off if they commit to a current incentive and then discover that ELM is more generous; they therefore do not need to wait for ELM schemes to begin before making a decision.<sup>92</sup> When we pressed him on how a land manager could make decisions about what land to allocate to tree planting without knowing how ELM will work,<sup>93</sup> the Minister accepted that, “until there is absolute clarity about ELM and what is going to be paid for [...] that uncertainty will always be there”<sup>94</sup> but he hoped the Government’s assurances had addressed at least some

80 [Q192](#) [Judicaelle Hammond, George Dunn]; [Q195](#) [Tom Bradshaw]

81 [Q194](#) [Tom Bradshaw, George Dunn, Judicaelle Hammond]

82 CLA ([TPW0059](#)) para 11 and 23

83 [Q194](#) [Judicaelle Hammond]

84 [Q103](#) [Shireen Chambers]

85 [Q194](#) [George Dunn]

86 [Q73–75](#)

87 Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Environmental Land Management and the agricultural transition](#), Second Report of the Session 2021–21, HC 78.

88 [Q196](#) [Tom Bradshaw]

89 [Q202](#)

90 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) paras 2.1–3 and 3.1

91 [Q221](#) [Steph Rhodes]

92 [Q269](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

93 [Q275](#) [Robbie Moore]

94 [Q275](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

of that uncertainty. He also said feedback from land managers and agents for landowners suggested that Defra’s engagement had removed “some of the jitters that some landowners have.”<sup>95</sup> Defra’s written evidence highlighted the publication of more information about the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) in November 2021, how it would work in 2022 and future years; the Local Nature Recovery pilot in 2022 and roll out from 2023; and launch of at least ten Landscape Recovery pilot projects between 2022 and 2024.<sup>96</sup>

33. When asked about a perception of “siloed” policy development, the Minister said this was “unavoidable”,<sup>97</sup> stressing it would be ideal if ELM was fully worked out; but they did not “have that luxury” and that given the “climate and biodiversity emergency and we have to start doing stuff now”.<sup>98</sup> However, according to Defra Director Edward Barker and Steph Rhodes, of the Forestry Commission, there had been very close work between their teams working to ensure join-up in how the schemes will operate.<sup>99</sup>

**34. The financial incentives the Government is providing must make it economically viable to plant trees. The overall direction of travel is laudable, and the interim English Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) provides better incentives than previous schemes. However, getting to net zero may be held up by a lack of progress and clarity on the Government’s Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes, and how the EWCO and ELM schemes will fit together. 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 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.**

## Incentives to manage woodlands

35. Even if the Government’s most ambitious projections for tree planting are realised, the volume of existing woodland is likely to be much greater than the amount of new woodland that is created for a significant time into the future.<sup>100</sup> Existing woodland has a key role to play in storing carbon from the atmosphere, contributing towards net zero, and supporting nature recovery and biodiversity.<sup>101</sup> Actively managing existing woodland by removing deadwood and thinning out trees increases how much carbon is absorbed and enhances their quality as a habitat.<sup>102</sup> Low intensity management can also help “young and better quality trees to thrive, thereby aiding the sequestration of more carbon, while allowing light in can increase biodiversity.”<sup>103</sup> However the CCC told us that currently

95 [Q275](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

96 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ([TPW0093](#)) para 2.2; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Policy Paper: Sustainable Farming Incentive: how the scheme will work in 2022](#) (December 2021)

97 [Q276](#) [Robbie Moore, Lord Goldsmith]

98 [Q277](#)

99 [Q278](#) [Edward Barker]; [Q223](#) [Steph Rhodes]

100 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 6.1; The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 19; [Q179](#) [Jenna Hegarty]

101 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 6.1; The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 19; [Q179](#) [Jenna Hegarty]

102 Climate Change Committee, [Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) (November 2018), p43; Forestry Commission, [The UK Forestry Standard](#) (2017)

103 Climate Change Committee, [Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) (November 2018), p43; Forestry Commission, [The UK Forestry Standard](#) (2017)

only 20% of broadleaf woodlands<sup>104</sup> are currently managed to the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS), which sets statutory requirements and best practice for how to create and manage woodland.<sup>105</sup> The CCC has recommended a target of 80% of broadleaf woodland being managed to UKFS standards.<sup>106</sup> Witnesses were clear that if we want woodland to deliver public benefits they need to be properly maintained, which means there must be financial incentives to maintain them.<sup>107</sup>

36. Robin Gray of the National Association of AONBs told us that “woodland management is the Cinderella of this whole topic”, as previous funding for maintenance activity had been insufficient. However, he said ELM had the potential to increase active sustainable woodland management.<sup>108</sup> The Government’s England Trees Action Plan recognises that existing trees and woodlands need better management. The Plan commits to creating a new grant scheme to help land managers improve the ecological condition of woodlands and to provide better grant support for tree health. It also commits to developing a new Woodland Resilience Implementation Plan for climate change, pests and diseases.<sup>109</sup> The Government is increasing the amount paid for woodland maintenance from £200 a hectare a year under the Countryside Stewardship scheme to £300 a hectare each year under the EWCO. However, as Judicaelle Hammond of the CLA observed, it can take 20-years for new woodland to generate commercial income from the sale of timber. Given that the current scheme’s support ceases after ten years, this leaves a ten-year gap, in which landowners still incur costs without public or commercial income.<sup>110</sup>

37. We also heard that the Government may be prioritising new tree planting over maintenance. Shireen Chambers of the ICF told us woodland management was “a real way forward” for trying to get to net zero, but was “a missed opportunity”, as the Government’s Action Plan placed a much greater focus to using planting to achieve this goal.<sup>111</sup> Jen Turner of the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) acknowledged the Plan partly addresses “the complete lack” of woodland management, with maintenance grants. However, she also highlighted the Plan’s “conflicting desire to get lots of trees in the ground,”<sup>112</sup> arguing that this would lead to a lot of trees being planted that will be “at risk of being unmanaged or undermanaged in the future.”<sup>113</sup>

38. Tom Bradshaw, NFU, argued that there was a lack of co-ordination in the approach to incentives for tree-planting and woodland management. He contrasted that “quite big incentives” are being offered to farmers to plant trees under the EWCO with the level of

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104 Broadleaf woodlands are characterised by trees without needles and most lose their leaves every year, such as oak, ash, birch and beech trees.

105 Forestry Commission, [The UK Forestry Standard: The governments’ approach to sustainable forestry](#) (December 2017). The UK Forestry Standard compiles statutory requirements and best practice for the creation and management of woodlands, and adherence to the Standard is a minimum requirement for receiving government grants.

106 Climate Change Committee, [Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) (November 2018), p43; Forestry Commission, [The UK Forestry Standard](#) (2017)

107 The Woodland Trust ([TPW0056](#)) paras 68 and 71; [Q96](#)

108 [Q134](#) [Robin Gray]

109 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p25

110 [Q192](#) [Judicaelle Hammond]; Forestry Commission, [England Wood Creation Offer grant manual](#) p26

111 [Q120](#) [Shireen Chambers]

112 [Q119](#) [Jen Turner]

113 [Q119](#) [Jen Turner]

payments being offered to manage existing woodland, which he said fell “woefully short” of the cost to manage that woodland.<sup>114</sup> He said active woodland management was “nearly falling out of scope” and needed higher payments.<sup>115</sup>

39. Forestry Commission Chair, Sir William Worsley said it was “absolutely key” to design ELM to get the woods we already have into management.<sup>116</sup> Regarding the 10-year limit on financial support for woodland management, Sir William said, “it would have been nice” if it could have been for longer, but argued that “10 years is pretty good.”<sup>117</sup> Both he and Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, suggested that private finance needed to be brought in to create an economic model that provides incentives beyond the initial 10-year period and make planting trees a sensible thing to do from a business perspective.<sup>118</sup> Lord Goldsmith said the Government would ensure that it becomes economically viable to manage woodland, “by adding value to those woodlands by creating more economic opportunities for woodland owners to make money from managing their woodlands well.”<sup>119</sup> He said, the England Trees Action Plan “put a lot of emphasis on woodland management” and not just planting.<sup>120</sup>

**40. Much of England’s existing woodland is under-managed and in poor condition. The Government’s objectives for net zero, nature recovery and biodiversity depend on existing woodland being much better managed. This will only happen if effective financial incentives are in place, but the Government’s has missed an opportunity with its new incentives to change the model for woodland management, by leaving a gap between when subsidies end, after ten years, and the start of income generation after around 20 years. 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.**

## Overall Government spending

41. The England Trees Action Plan committed to spend over £500m from the Nature for Climate Fund on trees and woodlands between 2020 and 2025.<sup>121</sup> The ICF welcomed this but said it was “still woefully short” of what was needed to increase woodland cover, compared to £3 billion available for agriculture in 2020.<sup>122</sup> Judicaelle Hammond of the CLA told us:

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

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114 [Q193](#)

115 [Q193](#)

116 [Q223](#) [Sir William Worsley]

117 [Q220](#) [Sir William Worsley]

118 [Qq220–21](#) [Sir William Worsley, Tony Juniper]

119 [Q273](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

120 [Q273](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

121 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p3

122 Institute of Chartered Foresters, [England Trees Action Plan - Institute response](#) (May 2021)

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.<sup>123</sup>

42. We asked the Minister about the adequacy of government spending up to 2025, to which he replied:

We will squeeze everything we can out of the £500 million, but clearly we are going to need more than that to realise all the ambitions that the Government are now committed to, including those ambitions that were recommitted to or strengthened as part of the COP process. So, £500 million is not the extent of the money that is going to be needed or even that is available for the task at hand, but it is the money that we currently have available because it is money that we secured from Treasury.<sup>124</sup>

43. The Net Zero Strategy and the 2021 Autumn Budget and Spending Review announced an increase in spending to £750m by 2025 from the Nature for Climate Fund for peat restoration, woodland creation and management.<sup>125</sup> Lord Goldsmith said most of the extra funding would go on trees<sup>126</sup> giving a total current budget of somewhere between £500–750m. Of that around £16.7m has been allocated to woodland management.<sup>127</sup>

**44. The Minister told us that the £500m allocated by the Government to woodland creation and management from 2020 to 2025 wouldn't be enough to realise the Government ambitions, and it is not clear whether the extra funding committed in the Spending Review will fill the gaps identified by the Minister. 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.**

## Commercial opportunities

45. In addition to income from government grants, the other major source of income that could make tree planting more attractive to landowners is through the commercial sale of timber. This could also have environmental benefits - the CCC's recommendation for reaching net zero requires both growing more trees and then capturing the carbon stored in those trees on a more permanent basis.<sup>128</sup> The CCC said that one of the most effective ways of using biomass to reduce greenhouse gases is to use wood in construction, both to store carbon and displace cement, brick and steel which emit high levels of carbon when created.<sup>129</sup> The Green Alliance highlighted that low-carbon buildings built in the UK had been delivered at no extra cost while using material (including timber) whose production emitted 25 and 50% of the carbon compared to a conventional building.<sup>130</sup>

123 [Q192](#) [Judicaelle Hammond]

124 [Q273](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

125 HM Government, *Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener*, (October 2020) p176; HM Treasury, *Policy Paper: Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021* (October 2021)

126 [Q311](#)

127 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [[TPW0093](#)] para 2.1

128 Climate Change Committee *Net Zero: The UK's contribution to stopping global warming* (May 2019), p162

129 Climate Change Committee, *Biomass in a low-carbon economy* (November 2018), p11

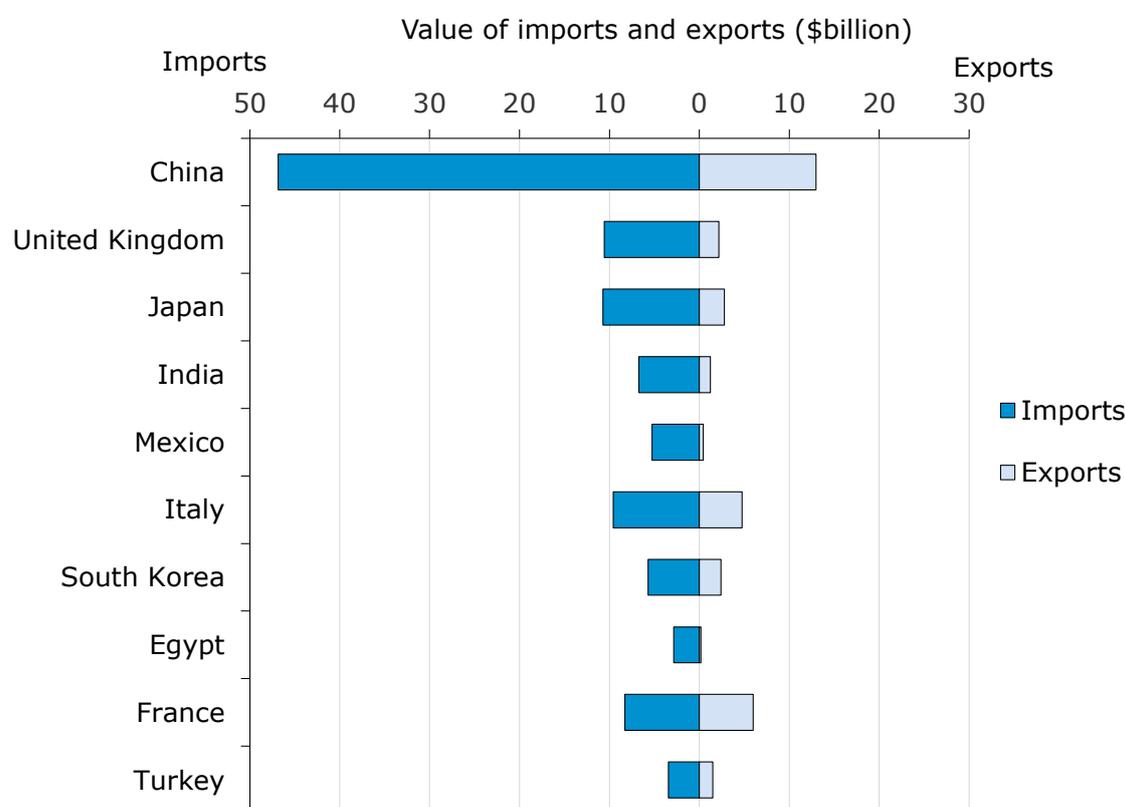
130 Green Alliance ([TPW0071](#)) para 16

46. The CCC also recommended growing the market for wood as fuel to incentivise the management of broadleaf woodlands,<sup>131</sup> but burning wood as fuel is controversial as it releases the carbon back into the atmosphere, unless carbon capture technology is used, and negatively affects air quality. BSW Timber Group called for regulations to ensure that timber should not be burnt as fuel whilst it can still be used as a construction material or recycled into other wood products.<sup>132</sup>

### UK reliance on imports

47. According to Forest Research in 2020, the UK imported 48 million cubic metres, 82% of all the wood it used.<sup>133</sup> The UK is the second highest importer of wood in the world, by value (see Figure 2).<sup>134</sup> This trend looks likely to continue with the World Bank estimating that global demand for wood will quadruple by 2050.<sup>135</sup>

Figure 2: Largest net importers of forest products, 2019



Source: Forest Research, [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021) p250

48. A significant proportion of imported timber comes from countries which are undergoing deforestation such as Brazil and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia. These imports therefore have serious environmental consequences, contributing to deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity loss in these countries.<sup>136</sup> The Landworkers' Alliance

131 Climate Change Committee, [Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) (November 2018), p42–3

132 BSW Timber group ([TPW0078](#)) para 17

133 [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021) pp135–6

134 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 3.4; Forest Research, [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021), p250

135 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 3.4

136 Forest Research, [Forestry Statistics 2021](#) (September 2021), pp149–50 and pp235–7

(LWA) criticised the UK’s “faith” in being able to rely on importing most of its material goods from overseas, which it said “undermined UK industry [and] led to deforestation overseas and increased pressure on climate as countries burn or export their forests.”<sup>137</sup> The RSPB highlighted “that the UK’s overseas land footprint for timber supply currently affects an area bigger than Scotland and is placing unacceptable impacts on international biodiversity”.<sup>138</sup> Confor asserted that any “significant rise in demand is likely to encourage illegal logging in developing countries.”<sup>139</sup> All our witnesses agreed that there is a need to meet domestic demand for timber from an increased domestic supply.

### **Increasing domestic production**

49. Meeting higher domestic demand will not be a quick solution as even fast-growing trees such as conifers take decades to reach maturity. Confor cited Forestry Commission data showing that less than 15% of the forest planted in England over the last five years will likely be suitable for wood production.<sup>140</sup> Hamish Macleod, BSW Timber Group, said that whilst there is “an appetite to grow more productive forestry” in the UK, the UK probably has a finite domestic supply of softwood for the next 20 years or so, which emphasised the importance of delivering on additional woodland creation to meet future demand.

50. The RFS called for measures to promote the market and supply chain for domestically grown hardwood from broadleaved trees and especially timber for construction.<sup>141</sup> The ICF, CLA and Green Alliance suggested using public procurement policies and building regulations to stimulate demand for home grown wood products instead of using concrete or steel.<sup>142</sup> Confor called for the UK tree planting target to be linked to a policy of increasing home-grown timber production, including an increase in its use in home building.<sup>143</sup> An estimated 75% of new homes in Scotland are built with timber frames compared to 22% in England, which shows the scope to change homebuilding practices by using more wood.<sup>144</sup>

51. Confor also advocated that the Government “set targets to increase domestic wood production and reduce its reliance on imports”, as part of its “post-Brexit trade strategy”.<sup>145</sup> The LWA called for investment in UK timber and for the use of regulations and tariffs to reduce demand for import.<sup>146</sup> The RSPB argued in favour of “sustainable domestic production”, based on “a more ecological approach to commercial forestry” which would also improve biodiversity.<sup>147</sup> It also called “robust” carbon accounting of woodland expansion and management about where the carbon in timber products ends up.<sup>148</sup>

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137 The Landworkers’ Alliance ([TPW0054](#)) para 4.5

138 RSPB ([TPW0064](#)) paras 36; WWF and RSPB, *Riskier Business: The UK’s Overseas Land Footprint, Summary Report*, (May 2020) Pp 5 and 7

139 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 3.4

140 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 1.9

141 The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 21

142 Institute of Chartered Foresters ([TPW0036](#)) para 16; Green Alliance ([TPW0071](#)) para 16; CLA ([TPW0059](#)) paras 18 and 36

143 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 3.4,

144 UK Government, *The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024* (May 2021) pp 19–20

145 Confor ([TPW0003](#)) para 4.10

146 The Landworkers’ Alliance ([TPW0054](#)) para 5.4

147 RSPB ([TPW0064](#)) para 37

148 RSPB ([TPW0064](#)) paras 37–9

## Government action

52. The Government’s England Trees Action Plan contains several initiatives aimed at increasing domestic production and consumption of wood, including:

- Financial support through a new £1.5m Forestry Innovation Fund to develop innovative timber products
- Working with key construction stakeholders to develop a policy roadmap on the use of timber
- Driving an increase in modern methods of construction which use sustainable materials like timber
- Working with Homes England and delivery partners to increase timber use in its housing programmes
- Using procurement policy to increase public demand for sustainably sourced timber, and
- Promoting research into barriers to the uptake of timber.<sup>149</sup>

53. During oral evidence, we raised with Lord Goldsmith, Minister for forestry policy, how the UK is combating overseas deforestation—in which UK consumption of imported timber plays a part. The Minister referred to the UK using its Presidency of COP26 to reach an agreement with over 140 countries on the Declaration on Forests and Land Use, to “halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030”.<sup>150</sup> Lord Goldsmith described it as a genuine “turning point due to the large financial commitments made by other countries and the private sector, and “signals” from financial institutions, commodity buyers and multilateral development banks, which he said had encouraged otherwise resistant countries to join the agreement.<sup>151</sup>

54. The Minister also referred to the Environment Act’s ‘due diligence’ provisions “to tackle illegal deforestation in UK supply chains” by making it “illegal for larger businesses operating in the UK to use key forest risk commodities produced on land illegally occupied or used.”<sup>152</sup> These businesses will have to “establish a system of due diligence for each regulated commodity” in their supply chain, on which they must report, and it establishes a due diligence enforcement system, using fines and civil sanctions.<sup>153</sup> He called it a “first step” in dealing with the UK’s “international deforestation footprint”,

149 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [TPW0093] paras 3.1–3; UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#) (May 2021) p19

150 United Nations Climate Change Conference, [Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on forests and land use](#) (November 2021); Cabinet Office, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Prime Minister’s Office, [Policy paper: World leaders summit on ‘Action on forests and land use’](#) (Updated 15 November 2021). Twelve countries, including the UK, committed a total of £8.75 billion from 2021–25, to support activities in developing countries, such as restoring degraded land, tackling wildfires and supporting the rights of indigenous communities, and the private sector pledged £5.3 billion.

151 [Q313](#)

152 [Q316](#) [Lord Goldsmith]; Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, [Consultation on implementing due diligence on forest risk commodities](#) (December 2021) p1

153 Environment Act 2021, [Section 116](#); Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, Natural England, and The Rt Hon George Eustice MP, [Press release: World-leading Environment Act becomes law](#) (accessed 7 January 2022); Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, [Consultation on implementing due diligence on forest risk commodities](#) (December 2021) p1

acknowledging that it only covers commodities and not timber products,<sup>154</sup> as the UK Timber Regulations “already prohibit the placing on the market of illegally harvested timber or timber products.”<sup>155</sup>

55. We also asked Lord Goldsmith what action the Government would take to stop UK-based financial institutions from continuing to invest in companies that are engaged in, and profit from, activities that cause global deforestation,<sup>156</sup> noting that some UK-based banks had not signed up to the Declaration on Forests and Land Use.<sup>157</sup> In response, the Minister declared an intention to talk to many of the financial institutions and businesses that had signed up to the Declaration. By the “end of the year”, he hoped to achieve an understanding of “from them how we can take [...] the best practice in the sector today and require that to become the norm tomorrow.”<sup>158</sup> The Minister agreed that government action was necessary to prevent UK financial institutions from investing in, and profiting from, deforestation,<sup>159</sup> and said, the Government had asked its own Global Resource Initiative Taskforce,<sup>160</sup> to also “look at financial institutions.” This was expected to report back soon, and the Minister said its conclusions would be considered “very seriously”.<sup>161</sup>

**56. Increasing domestic timber production and consumption can provide an additional revenue stream to support tree-planting, whilst helping to store carbon and reduce the UK’s reliance on timber imports, which contributes to overseas deforestation. While we welcome the steps the Government is taking to boost domestic production and increase the use of wood in construction, progress to date has been very limited. 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.**

57. While strengthening the demand for domestic timber may help the UK to meet its international commitment to end and reverse deforestation caused by UK businesses by 2030, it is only a small part of the solution. While not a central part of this inquiry, it also appeared to us that stronger action may be needed to stop UK-based financial institutions from supporting and profiting from any activity that is causing deforestation. We may return to look at this issue in a future inquiry.

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154 [Q316](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

155 Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, [Consultation on implementing due diligence on forest risk commodities](#) (December 2021) p9–10

156 [Q316](#) and [Q317](#) [Chair, Neil Parish]

157 [Q316](#) and [Q317](#) [Chair, Neil Parish]; [Q323](#) [Barry Gardiner]

158 [Q316](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

159 [Q323](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

160 Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, Department for International Development, and The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, [News story: Global Resource Initiative taskforce: greening the UK’s environmental footprint](#). (accessed 17 January 2022). The taskforce was established by the UK Government in 2019 with representatives from business and environmental groups to look at how the climate and environment impacts of key UK supply chains can be reduced.

161 [Q323](#) [Lord Goldsmith]. Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, [Due diligence on forest risk commodities](#) (accessed 7 January 2022).

## 4 Delivering tree planting

58. In this final chapter, we look at the enabling factors the Government needs to get right to deliver on its tree planting commitment. This includes the supply of trees, the sector's workforce and the rules surrounding the application process for new tree planting, as well as permanency rules on land-use, and farm tenancies.

### Tree supply

59. Defra and the Forestry Commission told us that UK nurseries produce over 100 million trees a year for forestry; but UK demand for trees often outstrips supply as nurseries lacked the “certainty of demand to significantly invest in increasing capacity to meet tree planting ambitions”.<sup>162</sup> According to Defra and the Commission, meeting the UK tree planting target will require an extra 30 million tree seedlings a year.<sup>163</sup> They said they were working to give the sector confidence to boost capacity to ensure enough planting stock is available to meet demand,<sup>164</sup> through the England Trees Action Plan by:

- Funding UK public and private sector nurseries and seed suppliers, including with capital grants to promote innovation, to “enhance quantity, quality, diversity and biosecurity of domestic tree production”, and
- Establishing a Nursery Notification Scheme to support nurseries and seed suppliers to “better plan for supply and demand” and “produce the right stock at the right time.”<sup>165</sup>

60. The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) and Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) were concerned that UK tree nurseries might not be able to scale up production quickly enough to support the planting targets, even with this additional support.<sup>166</sup> Brian Fraser of the HTA told us it “is not achievable” to produce the number of plants required for the targets within the Government’s 2024 timeframe, as “growing a tree to put in the ground takes between one and four years. [...] If we start sowing next year, it is only two years [before] we have to produce those plants.”<sup>167</sup> The RHS said that growers’ financial sustainability means they need “the up-front and long-term commitment of orders, with adequate down-payment/deposits [and] “advanced notice of requirements through forward contracting and procurement” to allow nurseries to plan production to meet demand.<sup>168</sup>

61. Forestry Commission Director, Steph Rhodes, told us the Commission agreed with the nursery sector’s own assessment, saying “it would be foolish [...] to assume” that the sector would manage to supply the number of plants needed within the Government’s 2024 timeframe.<sup>169</sup>

162 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission ([TPW0050](#)) para 105

163 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission ([TPW0050](#)) para 39

164 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission ([TPW0050](#)) paras 39 and 105

165 UK Government, *The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024*, (May 2021) p18

166 [Q85](#); Royal Horticultural Society ([TPW0040](#)) para 11

167 [Q85](#)

168 Royal Horticultural Society ([TPW0040](#)) para 11

169 [Q225](#)

62. By contrast, Lord Goldsmith told us that the 2020 Clegg Review, an unpublished report into the future supply and demand for forestry in the UK, had concluded “the nursery sector would be able to meet demand,”<sup>170</sup> by producing an additional 30 to 40 million saplings every year by 2025.<sup>171</sup> He said the issue was not if nurseries could “scale up” production; but instead their concern “that they might get burnt as they have done in previous years when huge numbers of saplings have been prepared and planted only for them not to be bought.”<sup>172</sup> He also said the Government had “to convince the nursery sector that this is not just a political whim, that this is something that is going to continue, that we are committed to that 30,000 [hectares of tree planting a year], and that that 30,000 is likely to increase to 50,000 and that it does not matter who the next Government is, that the commitment will remain.”<sup>173</sup>

63. Defra Director, Edward Barker, also said the Department was working on an industry suggestion to create a “confidential information sharing system”, to help nurseries find out “more about demand” than they currently do from the market, to make it “easier to balance supply and demand” and give nurseries more confidence.<sup>174</sup> He also said Defra’s tree production innovation fund would help improve the capacity of nurseries with a £10 million budget in 2021/22.<sup>175</sup> Responding to the sector’s concerns about the lack of certainty, Lord Goldsmith said that the Government had already given the nursery sector a “pretty big signal” about “rapidly escalating demand”. He continued that, because of government incentives, nurseries knew there would be a demand for English native broadleaf trees so they “would not be taking a huge risk by knowing that you had a pretty good case for scaling up massively”.<sup>176</sup>

**64. Tree nursery representatives and the Forestry Commission told us that nurseries in the UK will struggle to expand production to deliver the number of young trees required for the Government to achieve its planting ambitions by the end of this Parliament. We believe that the Government should aim to meet all UK planting needs from domestically grown trees. To achieve this the Government needs to give the sector greater confidence to invest and expand production, given that it can take up to four years to grow the trees required for planting. We reiterate our recommendation that the UK Government set annual targets for the number of trees that will be planted in England, which we believe would greatly help the sectors’ confidence in the Government’s commitment to tree planting. We also ask the Government to update us on progress establishing a confidential information sharing system with nurseries, and on the outcomes of the £10m invested via the tree production innovation fund.**

### Wykeham nursery

65. During our inquiry we learned that Forestry England, an Executive Agency of the Forestry Commission, plans to close its Wykeham nursery in North Yorkshire, one of

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170 [Q285](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

171 [Q285](#) [Lord Goldsmith; Edward Barker]. Defra has confirmed The Clegg Review is an unpublished report commissioned by the Scottish Government agency, Forestry and Land Scotland which is responsible for managing national forests and land.

172 [Q285](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

173 [Q285](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

174 [Q285](#) [Edward Barker]

175 [Q285](#) [Edward Barker]

176 [Qq291-2](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

only two it runs, in April 2022.<sup>177</sup> The reason given was a fall in demand for trees from the public sector in Scotland and Wales which have switched supply to the private sector.<sup>178</sup> Lord Goldsmith and the Commission Chair Sir William Worsley, told us the closure would not affect the nursery sector's ability to supply enough trees.<sup>179</sup> However, Brian Fraser of the HTA told us that closing any nursery was “not good for the sector” as skills and plant supply would be lost and it put “pressure” on the private sector.<sup>180</sup> Dr Darren Moorcroft of The Woodland Trust said it was better to “spread our risk” as having more than one nursery provided a better risk management against pests and diseases, some of which could “close a nursery for a number of years.”<sup>181</sup>

**66. We were given reassurances that the closure of one of two Forestry England nurseries will not affect the overall ability of the nursery sector to produce enough trees. Given the challenges facing the sector, however, reducing the UK's nursery capacity indicates a lack of policy co-ordination. We remain concerned about the additional pressure the closure may place on the sector and the possible reduction in our ability to manage risks to tree health. 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.**

### **Imports and biosecurity**

67. Given the challenges with domestic supply, Steph Rhodes of the Forestry Commission told us they were “planning for the scenario where additional imports would be needed for the short-term, while the nursery capacity [is] increased.”<sup>182</sup> However this approach carries its own risks that pests and diseases may be imported with the trees. The Woodland Trust told us that whilst tree imports had increased from £6m in 1992 to £93 million in 2019, twenty serious plant pests or diseases had also been “inadvertently imported into the UK” over the same period, which has also see an increasing number of trees are being lost to diseases like Dutch Elm disease and Ash dieback.<sup>183</sup> It said there were 127 other diseases and pests that represented a high risk to the UK, 47 of which could each cost over £1 billion to deal with.<sup>184</sup>

68. Defra and the Forestry Commission said that while wanting “more planting material to be sown and grown in the UK” to counter the risks to tree health,<sup>185</sup> they were also taking steps to address the biosecurity risk posed by imports. These included:

- Supporting and promoting UK-growers' take-up of the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme which helps businesses and organisations develop “a consistent plant health management system and their responsibilities within the plant supply chain”, whether for imports or domestically-grown plants,<sup>186</sup>

177 Forestry England, [Wykeham nursery news briefing](#) (accessed 15 December 2021)

178 Forestry England, [Wykeham nursery news briefing](#) (accessed 15 December 2021)

179 [Q286](#) [Lord Goldsmith]; [Q228](#) [Sir William Worsley]

180 [Q90](#) [Brian Fraser]

181 [Q155](#) [Dr Moorcroft]

182 [Q225](#)

183 The Woodland Trust ([TPW0056](#)) para 69

184 The Woodland Trust ([TPW0056](#)) para 69

185 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission ([TPW0050](#)) para 56

186 Plant Healthy, [Plant Health Management Standard](#) (May 2021)

- Consulting on extra biosecurity measures for high-risk tree species and commodities, and
- Publishing a new GB Plant Biosecurity Strategy and to drive higher international biosecurity standards by 2022.<sup>187</sup>

69. The Woodland Trust questioned how robust the Government’s biosecurity measures were, given they included a “hiatus in border checks on plants entering” Great Britain from 1 January 2021. Instead, checks occurred at the “Place of Destination” for all non-high risk plants and plant products, which it claimed risked spreading pests and diseases “before they are detected”.<sup>188</sup> From 1 July 2022, the Government plans to require all regulated plants and plant products imported from the EU (except Ireland) to be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate and to enter Great Britain via an appropriate Border Control Post (BCP) in order to undergo physical checks.<sup>189</sup>

70. We asked the Forestry Commission and Natural England what they were doing to minimise biosecurity risks to woodland creation and nature recovery. Commission Chair, Sir William Worsley, said border checks were “pretty stringent”.<sup>190</sup> Commission Director, Steph Rhodes, said extra funding from the Nature for Climate Fund had been made available to increase capacity and improve processes to inspect imports.<sup>191</sup> Lord Goldsmith told us, “we do not want to end up having to import huge numbers of saplings in order to fulfil the commitments that we have made on tree planting because we will end up importing problems”.<sup>192</sup> He said, “I would rather we had a much tighter approach than we do. That is one of the reasons why we are putting so much emphasis on scaling up and boosting our home-grown nursery sector.”<sup>193</sup>

**71. To meet the Government’s tree planting goals, we are going to need to import seeds and young trees until domestic capacity increases. This carries the risks of pests and diseases being introduced. We welcome the work Defra and the Forestry Commission are doing to tighten biosecurity and the additional funding that has been provided to support this work. However, we heard concerns that delays in introducing checks at the border, with checks instead occurring at the place of destination, increases the risk of pests and diseases being spread before they are detected. 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.**

## Forestry workforce

72. In 2019, England’s forestry sector directly employed 10,750 people and a further 8,500 people in primary timber processing.<sup>194</sup> According to the Forestry Skills Forum,

187 UK Government, *The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024*, (May 2021) p29

188 The Woodland Trust (TPW0056) para 70; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Place of Destination Question and Answer Guide](#) (accessed 15 December 2021)

189 This can either be at the port itself or at an “Inland Border Facility”)

190 [Q226](#) [Sir William Worsley]

191 [Q225](#)

192 [Q285](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

193 [Q294](#)

194 Official for National Statistics, [Official Labour Market Statistics](#) figures from 2019, cited by Forestry Skills Forum, [Forestry Workforce Research](#) (August 2021), p4

if the Government's tree planting ambitions are to be achieved by 2025 the number of people needed in roles such as restocking, harvesting and woodland creation roles will have to expand by almost half, from 1,341 up to 2,019.<sup>195</sup> For woodland creation jobs the expansion needed is more than four-fold, from 100 in 2019 up to 425 by 2025.<sup>196</sup>

73. Professor Bateman, University of Exeter Business School, told us that the sector was unlikely to be able to recruit this workforce due to “a 50-year period of retrenchment in forestry” which had “stripped knowledge (and funding) out of the sector”.<sup>197</sup> Multiple organisations raised concerns about the lack of resources and skills preventing local authorities from meeting their responsibilities under the Environment Act, including on woodland creation.<sup>198</sup> The Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) told us “there is barely capacity” in the sector for current planting and maintenance, “let alone” the new targets due to an ageing workforce and challenges in attracting new entrants.<sup>199</sup> This view was shared by Confor, the HTA and BSW Timber Group,<sup>200</sup> despite some businesses having created and funded apprenticeships.<sup>201</sup>

74. The ICF wanted the Government to address the workforce and skills issue via its skills strategy and immigration policy, stressing the importance of UK-working across the four nations to deliver a “coordinated push to promote forestry careers”.<sup>202</sup> The Royal Forestry Society (RFS) told us more work was also needed to upskill the existing workforce, arguing that a large number of land managers have “little or no knowledge and understanding of woodland management.”<sup>203</sup> It said, that an effective sector-led outreach programme would minimise the risks that “the short-term prospect of grants”, will lead to trees being planted “which later fail through lack of evidence-led planning, neglect or mis-management.”<sup>204</sup>

75. The RFS also said that existing Forestry Skills Forum training, which the RFS runs for the Forestry Commission, is unable to address the sector's skills needs due to lack of government funding.<sup>205</sup> It said there would only be enough skilled foresters “when there is [a] commitment to properly fund schools outreach, reverse the long-run under-funding of Further Education provision and support skills training in small businesses”.<sup>206</sup> Shireen Chambers of the ICF told us that implementing the existing Forum skills plan and the England Trees Action Plan, depended on a strong cross-government approach, but said there was no evidence that the Department for Education (DfE), the Department

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195 Forestry Skills Forum, [Forestry Workforce Research](#) (August 2021), p39. The report looked at the status of employment, education and skills in forestry in England and Wales.

196 Forestry Skills Forum, [Forestry Workforce Research](#) (August 2021), p38

197 Prof Ian Bateman ([TPW0030](#)) para 5

198 The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) ([TPW0019](#)) para 4 and 20; Arboricultural Association ([TPW0048](#)) para 6.2; The City of London Corporation ([TPW0080](#)) para 16; National Forest Company ([TPW0057](#)) para 4.3, 6.3 and 6.4

199 Institute of Chartered Foresters ([TPW0036](#)) para 9

200 [Q84](#) [Caroline Ayre, Brian Fraser, Hamish Macleod]

201 [Q84](#) [Hamish Macleod]

202 Institute of Chartered Foresters ([TPW0036](#)) para 5 and 11

203 The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 11

204 The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 11

205 The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 13–14

206 The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 15

for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) or other Government departments were involved.<sup>207</sup> She also said no funding had been allocated for skills as “it is not seen as Defra’s job”, and that it was unclear who was responsible.<sup>208</sup>

76. The England Trees Action Plan states it will “build a bigger skilled workforce”, by supporting:

- The Forestry Skills Forum to create a new Forestry Skills Action Plan for England, and
- Forestry England to deliver apprenticeships and work with Further Education institutions to strengthen training and skills for foresters and people working in the forestry supply chain.<sup>209</sup>

77. Forestry Commission Chair, Sir William Worsley, acknowledged the lack of a skilled workforce is a key barrier to the tree planting targets,<sup>210</sup> telling us the low numbers of people wanting to work in the sector in the last 30 years had led to less demand for forestry courses and fewer course providers.<sup>211</sup> He said for courses to run, forestry and woodland management had “to be seen as a really good career.”<sup>212</sup> He suggested the targets and funding for tree-planting make it an “exciting career”, and told us some land agents and countryside managers were retraining as they saw woodland management as a future career.<sup>213</sup> Steph Rhodes told us the Commission had managed to secure funding from the Nature for Climate Fund to address skills, and it planned to use its 2021-survey of the current workforce and its “projected needs to 2025 and 2030”, to build an evidence base on “the size and shape of the gap” and how to address it, which it would use to bid for further funding.<sup>214</sup>

78. Lord Goldsmith told us that Defra was working with DfE, BEIS and other departments, to ensure “a proper, meaningful cross-Whitehall delivery group” exists, that recognises the sector’s workforce needs and which the Government can address.<sup>215</sup> He said Defra was talking to DfE to make sure the future workforce would have “enough” Further Education facilities to “skill up people for the sector”.<sup>216</sup> He also said Defra had started funding a Forestry Skills Hub to bring together education providers and sector employers to ensure “that where jobs do exist people are aware of them and are trained up for them.”<sup>217</sup> Defra Director Edward Barker said the Department was also looking at funding for apprenticeships and delivery of short-term courses for new entrants, careers advice to attract new entrants, as well as how to “make forestry a more appealing career”.<sup>218</sup>

**79. The lack of a sufficiently large skilled workforce is a key barrier to England’s tree planting ambitions. Addressing this requires a well-funded and planned workforce and skills strategy. Defra and the Forestry Commission are working to address the**

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207 [Q104](#) [Shireen Chambers]

208 [Q109](#)

209 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p21–22

210 [Q230](#)

211 [Q231](#)

212 [Q231](#)

213 [Q230](#)

214 [Q232](#) [Steph Rhodes]

215 [Q298](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

216 [Q298](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

217 [Q299](#) [Lord Goldsmith]

218 [Q299](#) [Edward Barker]

issue, but work is in the early stages and looks unlikely to deliver the immediate improvement needed, particularly in woodland creation roles that need to increase by over 75%. *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.*

### Seasonal workers

80. Given the challenges in meeting the sector's workforce needs domestically, at least in the short term, immigration is likely to play a key part supporting the sector. Both the HTA, the trade body for the ornamental horticulture sector, and BSW Timber Group Plc told us that restrictions on seasonal labour have been a barrier to tree planting, as the Government's Seasonal Workers Pilot scheme did not apply to ornamental horticulture before 2022.<sup>219</sup> The HTA reported that in 2021 the total size of the UK plant and tree growers workforce was 18,000 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) workers, and it employed 6,000 seasonal FTE workers; but it needed an extra 1,200 seasonal workers of which tree nurseries were short of 800 seasonal workers.<sup>220</sup> Some 52% of growers had said the labour shortage was affecting their businesses, including their ability to deliver higher numbers of new trees.<sup>221</sup>

81. The Government has since announced an extension of the Seasonal Workers Pilot scheme to the ornamental horticulture sector, including tree and forest nurseries, from 1 January 2022. The total number of visas available for seasonal workers remains unchanged at 30,000 for 2022.<sup>222</sup> The Government has said that an additional 10,000 visa could be made available although it did not specify under what circumstances. The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) welcomed the extension, saying a three-year scheme gave certainty. However, the Association said that some growers were "struggling to access" the Pilot as labour providers already had "full order books for this year for existing edible horticulture producers."<sup>223</sup> The HTA wanted the number of visas increased and for visas to be extended to 9 months, to reflect tree growers' needs.<sup>224</sup>

**82. We welcome the Government's extension of the Seasonal Workers Pilot to the ornamental sector which should go some way to addressing the immediate labour shortage facing the sector. 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.**

219 [Q80](#) [Brian Fraser]; [Q81](#) [Hamish Macleod]; Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [News story: Up to 30,000 workers to help reap 2021 harvest](#), 22 December 2020

220 Horticultural Trades Association ([LS0025](#)) para 5.2 (submitted to our [Labour shortages in the food and farming sector inquiry](#)); Horticultural Trades Association ([TPW0091](#)) paras 3–5

221 Horticultural Trades Association ([TPW0091](#)) paras 3–5

222 UK Visas and Immigration, [Workers and Temporary Workers: guidance for sponsors: sponsor a seasonal worker](#) (January 2022)

223 Horticultural Trades Association ([TPW0094](#)) para 3–5

224 Horticultural Trades Association ([TPW0094](#)) para 3–5

## Regulatory issues

### Application process

83. Tree planting proposals are regulated under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regime which has two stages. Applicants will need to submit a ‘stage 1’ EIA to the Forestry Commission for its view on whether a project “is likely to have a significant effect on the environment”.<sup>225</sup> If the Commission decides, based on this stage 1 assessment, that a project “will have a significant effect on the environment” then the applicant must apply for ‘stage 2’ consent and prepare an Environmental Statement. This must provide a “full [...] understanding of the consequences” of the proposal, which will be subject to public scrutiny, before going ahead with their project.<sup>226</sup> The Commission also used thresholds to give an indicative “presumption” on likely significant environmental effect of a project—with projects of less than 0.5 hectares on land with no particular sensitivity, being unlikely to need a stage 2 consent.<sup>227</sup> Proposals over 2 hectares and of any size in a “sensitive area”, like a Site of Special Scientific Interest or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty need to be screened to determine if a full Environmental Statement is required before consent is given.<sup>228</sup>

84. Some of the evidence we received called for the regulatory system for tree-planting to be improved. The NFU told us land managers must follow a complicated process requiring expert advice, to show UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) compliance and to complete an EIA and woodland management plan.<sup>229</sup> It said the Government should reduce “complexity”, provide training and draw up better guidance to help land managers deal with the process.<sup>230</sup> Judicaelle Hammond, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), said their members were most concerned about the “timing and costs” in making applications rather than the EIA process.<sup>231</sup> She suggested the process could be improved by: running the different consultations required for the EIA “concurrently” rather than sequentially; and by the Forestry Commission providing “a clear and realistic timetable” for the approval process.<sup>232</sup>

85. In 2016, the Scottish Government commissioned James Mackinnon, a former Chief Planner for Scotland, to review how forestry planting proposals are considered and approved, including how the EIA system worked, to help Scotland reach its planting targets.<sup>233</sup> The CLA and Confor both called for a “MacKinnon review for England”, to review and speed up England’s application and approvals process for woodland creation.<sup>234</sup> They credited it as one reason why Scotland’s planting rate had increased from 4,600 hectares in 2016 to over 11,000 hectares by 2020,<sup>235</sup> although other factors such as land availability, lower population density and political support were also cited.<sup>236</sup> The Mackinnon Review

225 Forestry Commission, [Guidance: Environmental Impact Assessments for woodland](#) (September 2021)

226 Forestry Commission, [Guidance: Environmental Impact Assessments for woodland](#) (September 2021)

227 Forestry Commission, [Guidance: Environmental Impact Assessments for woodland](#) (September 2021)

228 Forestry Commission, [Guidance: Environmental Impact Assessments for woodland](#) (September 2021)

229 The National Farmers’ Union (TPW0035) para 9; Forestry Commission, [The UK Forestry Standard: The governments’ approach to sustainable forestry](#) (December 2017). Adherence to the Standard is a minimum requirement for receiving government grants.

230 The National Farmers’ Union (TPW0035) para 9

231 Q195 [Judicaelle Hammond]

232 Q195 [Judicaelle Hammond]

233 Scottish Government, [Forestry planting proposals: Mackinnon report](#) (December 2016) p3

234 CLA (TPW0059) paras 4, 19–20; Confor (TPW0003) para 2.7–2.9.

235 CLA (TPW0059) paras 4, 19–20; Confor (TPW0003) para 2.7–2.9.

236 Confor (TPW0003) para 4.12; Q56 [Jim Mackinnon]; Q108 [Jen Turner, Shireen Chambers]

recommended a more risk-based approach to regulation with independent accredited agents certifying most schemes, and Forestry Scotland scrutinising larger or more sensitive schemes; more focused and quicker EIA-screening with other agencies not routinely consulted; and simplified grant approval processes..<sup>237</sup> These reforms were taken forward by the Scottish Government.<sup>238</sup>

86. Environmental charities were more concerned about the possibility of regulations changing and stressed the importance of maintaining regulatory controls. The Woodland Trust told us the regulations for woodland creation “are an essential environmental safeguard” and it strongly opposed any “dilution”.<sup>239</sup> RSPB also strongly opposed a “de-regulatory approach” for achieving the tree planting targets.<sup>240</sup> It highlighted that EIA screening thresholds were raised in 2018 and said they were concerned about the Forestry Commission’s “reluctance” to require applicants to prepare an Environmental Statement and overruling Natural England’s advice on at least one occasion, even when thresholds were exceeded.<sup>241</sup> Both the RSPB and the Trust said that the Commission and Natural England needed better funding to improve administration, with would reduce the delays faced by applicants.<sup>242</sup>

87. We asked James Mackinnon if speeding-up the process in Scotland was at the expense of properly considered EIAs. He told us what his review tried to do was to “front-load the system” by screening out applications with negative impacts on protected sites or species, instead of lengthy consultation about whether it needed an environmental impact statement.<sup>243</sup> Mr Mackinnon also said they’d worked with agencies and applicants to improve communication about the information required and how to correctly submit it.<sup>244</sup> He said that since the reforms were introduced only 2% of proposals in Scotland had been subject to “full-blown” EIAs.<sup>245</sup>

### *Efforts to streamline regulation*

88. The England Trees Action Plan said the Government would review regulatory requirements “to streamline” the application process “while strengthening environmental protections”, to “deliver high quality woodlands at the scale needed to meet our tree planting targets.”<sup>246</sup> The Forestry Commission and Natural England highlighted the following measures to support this process:

- Agreement of better coordination and cooperation where their regulatory processes overlap,<sup>247</sup>

237 Scottish Government, [Forestry planting proposals: Mackinnon report](#) (December 2016) pp24–6

238 Scottish Government, [Delivering planting progress](#) (December 2016)

239 The Woodland Trust ([TPW0056](#)) para 57

240 RSPB ([TPW0064](#)) para 22

241 RSPB ([TPW0064](#)) para 22

242 RSPB ([TPW0064](#)) paras 25 and 29; The Woodland Trust ([TPW0056](#)) para 58; [Q141](#) [Dr Moorcroft]

243 [Q19](#)

244 [Q19](#)

245 [Q19](#)

246 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p 16

247 Forestry Commission ([TPW0087](#)) para 1

- Including “as much as possible of the regulatory process within the grant application” so the Commission can give EIA-decisions at the same time as it gives grants offer,<sup>248</sup>
- Developing stronger guidance on tree planting, peatland and bird surveys, including when planting will not be supported, “to ensure applicants are clearer about the likelihood of progressing” an application or not,<sup>249</sup>
- Providing better data to enable applicants and regulators to “screen” for environmental constraints early on,<sup>250</sup> and
- Developing best practice protocols so that applicants are clear on what environmental surveys require, to help ensure their survey information meets required standards and reduce the risk of delayed decisions.<sup>251</sup>

89. Lord Goldsmith told us that Defra, via the Forestry Commission, would continue to license planting through an EIA based approach, “ensuring compliance with environmental standards” under the UKFS. However, the EIA system would be reviewed by Defra by May 2022.<sup>252</sup>

90. On funding, both the Forestry Commission and Natural England acknowledged the additional resources they were allocated in the Autumn 2021 Budget and Spending Review.<sup>253</sup> However, both said they would need more staff and resources to support the woodland cover targets. The Commission said the uplift had allowed it to recruit staff to work on the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) and regulation; but continued delivery depended on continued funding for these roles. It said it needed to recruit more staff to advise landowners about woodland creation and management and grants and regulatory processes.<sup>254</sup> Natural England said it had received an uplift of £63m for its statutory duties on nature recovery, and to strengthen its “frontline staff capability” on woodland creation and peatland restoration.<sup>255</sup> Natural England told us it had sought extra funding to maintain and grow this capability through to 2024, subject to the Spending Review.<sup>256</sup>

**91. The application and approvals process for tree planting is seen as too bureaucratic by land-owning and forestry organisations. While we understand the importance of not weakening the environmental controls, there appears to be a consensus that it is possible to speed up the approval process by improving administration, guidance and advice. While the Government has provided additional resources for the Forestry Commission and Natural England, it needs to ensure that funding keeps pace with the likely increase in application numbers and requests for advice and support. 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**

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248 Forestry Commission (TPW0087) para 1

249 Natural England (TPW0024) para 12

250 Forestry Commission (TPW0087) para 1

251 Natural England (TPW0024) para 11

252 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [TPW0093] para 1.5–1.6

253 HM Treasury, *Policy Paper: Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021* (October 2021)

254 Forestry Commission (TPW0087) para 4–6

255 Natural England (TPW0088) para 13 and 21

256 Natural England (TPW0088) para 21

*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.*

### Rules on permanent land use

92. England’s woodland is mainly regulated under the Forestry Act 1967 which licenses most tree felling.<sup>257</sup> Its primary purpose is not environmental protection, but to maintain “a strategic timber reserve”.<sup>258</sup> It does this through the current policy on permanence which creates a “presumption against” deforestation unless it is in the public interest.<sup>259</sup> Many respondents told us the rules largely make creating and expanding woodland legally irreversible, as felling licences are usually granted only on condition of replanting.<sup>260</sup> This means landowners may be unwilling to create woodlands on their land, as they cannot be sure they will be able to change the land use back if things do not work out.<sup>261</sup> This is a particular concern at the moment given the continued uncertainty about the levels of public funding for woodland under the government’s new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme.

93. Change in land use can also lead to a “significant” devaluation in the value of that land.<sup>262</sup> The National Forest Company said that changing the use of land, can see it fall from £10,000 per hectare for farmland to £5,000 - £6,000 for woodland.<sup>263</sup> The RFS said the phasing-out of European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy’s Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) for farmers “will change the relative value of agriculture and other land uses” but it may not “bridge the perceived or actual risk of a permanent land use change.”<sup>264</sup> The RFS called for a review of the permanency rules and said funding for woodland creation needed an “explicit income foregone element”.<sup>265</sup>

94. Relaxing the permanency rules was also called for by the CLA and NFU, who argued it would allow landowners and farmers to try tree planting without forever being “locked into” using their land in this way.<sup>266</sup> The CLA said it could encourage small scale tree planting and agroforestry,<sup>267</sup> which the current rules deter. They suggested exempting agroforestry and new woodland below a certain area threshold for permanency.<sup>268</sup> The Tenant Farmer Association (TFA) and CLA said landowners may be less opposed to

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257 Forestry Act 1967, [Part II](#)

258 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission ([TPW0050](#)) para 142; Forestry Commission, [Guidance: Get consent to convert woodland to open habitats](#) (July 2018)

259 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission ([TPW0050](#)) para 142; Forestry Commission, [Guidance: Get consent to convert woodland to open habitats](#) (July 2018)

260 Natural England ([TPW0024](#)) para 13; The National Farmers’ Union ([TPW0035](#)) para 3; Institute of Chartered Foresters ([TPW0036](#)) para 10; The Soil Association ([TPW0037](#)) para 18; The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 9

261 [Q198](#)

262 [Q209](#) [Judicaelle Hammond]

263 National Forest Company ([TPW0057](#)) para 2.7

264 The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 9

265 The Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#)) para 9

266 CLA ([TPW0059](#)) para 26; The National Farmers’ Union ([TPW0035](#)) para 3

267 Where trees are grown on grazing land or alongside crops.

268 CLA ([TPW0059](#)) para 26

tenants planting trees if it is not permanent and the land can be farmed again in future.<sup>269</sup> The NFU also called for a new “category of woodland” so it can be treated as a rotated crop.<sup>270</sup>

95. The NFU and TFA both suggested a time-limited ‘permanency commitment’ for using land as woodland to store carbon.<sup>271</sup> Tom Bradshaw, NFU, suggested it could be for a “25, 30 or 40-year period.”<sup>272</sup> He said, after you have harvested that woodland, and it has gone into a more permanent form of carbon storage, farmers should have the flexibility to change the land’s use back to farming if “there is the demand for food”, instead of permanently keeping it as woodland.<sup>273</sup>

96. Some environmental organisations also had concerns about the permanent land-use rules. The UK Environmental Law Association suggested they had been a key reason why England had missed previous tree-planting targets.<sup>274</sup> The Soil Association supported the permanency rules for existing and new native woodland but said the rules are a “powerful disincentive to farmer-led tree planting,”<sup>275</sup> The Soil Association suggested regulation could be supplemented with farm public payments to incentivise and “maintain, or increase, the level of non-permanent tree cover”, whilst allowing its location to be “dynamic” so that farmers can build it into how they rotate their land.<sup>276</sup>

**97. The current permanency rules discourage farmers and landowners from engaging with tree planting for fear that they will never be able to change the land use back to growing crops or grazing if the new woodland does not prove viable. While we recognise the need to maintain and develop the national timber reserve, this does not mean that the rules have to apply to new woodland growth on farmland. 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.**

### **Farm tenancies**

98. As mentioned earlier, tenant farmers—farmers who operate by farming land which they lease from a landowner—face particular challenges engaging in tree planting schemes due to the legal framework that their tenancy operates under.<sup>277</sup> According to the TFA, most tenants cannot plant trees on their holdings as “blanket clauses” in tenancy agreements require them “to use their holdings for agricultural purposes only”, or clauses “specifically ban the planting of trees.”<sup>278</sup> In addition, many Farm Business Tenancies (FBT) are short term and so are not compatible with the long-term commitment involved

269 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) para 7.1; CLA ([TPW0059](#)) para 26

270 The National Farmers’ Union ([TPW0035](#)) para 11

271 [Q187 and Q198](#) [Tom Bradshaw]; [Q199](#) [George Dunn]

272 [Q187](#) [Tom Bradshaw]

273 [Q187](#) [Tom Bradshaw]

274 UK Environmental Law Association ([TPW0055](#)) para 18

275 The Soil Association ([TPW0037](#)) para 16

276 The Soil Association ([TPW0037](#)) para 16

277 [Q202](#)

278 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) para 3.1

in tree planting.<sup>279</sup> FBTs apply to almost half of England’s tenants and about 30% of English farmland, and they last on average under 4-years and 90% of new tenancies last for no more than 5 years.<sup>280</sup>

99. Different types of tenancies provide different legal rights which will affect tenants’ potential ability to participate in tree planting schemes.<sup>281</sup> The TFA explained that under the Agriculture Act 2020, tenants who are FBTs under the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 are unable to challenge landlords who refuse to allow them to participate in government funding schemes like those which encourage tree-planting.<sup>282</sup> The TFA said these tenants should be given the same protection under the Agriculture Act 2020 as tenants who let holdings under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986, who can object to a “landlord’s unreasonable refusal” to allow them to participate in such schemes.<sup>283</sup> It also called for longer-term tenancies, the relaxation of tenancy rules so that tenants can contribute to the tree-planting objectives and for new planting schemes with provisions to allow tenants to participate.<sup>284</sup>

100. The TFA was also concerned that some landlords had threatened to take back land for tree planting as “leverage” to get tenants to pay more rent to stay on their land, or to participate directly in tree planting schemes themselves.<sup>285</sup> According to the NFU, some of its members who are tenants had “already [seen] some landlords take land back in hand”, rather than re-let it. The NFU were concerned about how uncertainties over future incentives such as for Environmental Land Management and for tree-planting may be “putting real pressure” on some shorter-term tenancies.<sup>286</sup> However, Judicaelle Hammond of the CLA said past government-funded tree planting schemes had not seen any major move to “displace tenants” even when payments for tree-planting were above the income they received from their tenants.<sup>287</sup> She stressed landowners and farmers wanted to keep good tenants and “were looking at [tree] planting through collaboration”.<sup>288</sup> The TFA and CLA told us they have been holding discussions to try and develop guidance for landlords and tenants about tree-planting.<sup>289</sup>

101. The Government has acknowledged that tenant farmers face challenges if they want to plant trees because of the short length of some tenancies and as tree planting affects “the land holding’s status for agricultural use”.<sup>290</sup> It has said it will “work with agricultural tenancy stakeholders to support woodland creation on tenanted land.”<sup>291</sup> On 28 January, Defra announced the establishment of a Tenancy Working Group to look at “how tenant farmers and tenancies can be better supported as farming in England is reformed to be

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279 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) para 3.1

280 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) para 16 and para 3.1

281 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) paras 2.6 and 3.1

282 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) paras 2.5–6

283 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) paras 2.5–6

284 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) paras 2.2–2.3, 3.1

285 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#)) para 4.1

286 [Q187](#) [Tom Bradshaw]

287 [Q199](#) [Judicaelle Hammond]

288 [Q199](#) [Judicaelle Hammond]

289 [Q205](#) [George Dunn]; [Q207](#) [Judicaelle Hammond]

290 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p23

291 UK Government, [The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024](#), (May 2021) p23

more sustainable.” This will provide tenant farmers and others a “further opportunity to make sure the new environmental land management schemes work within agricultural tenancies.”<sup>292</sup>

**102. We heard concerns that legal restrictions on many tenancies and their short-term length will prevent many tenant farmers from engaging in tree-planting. Conversely, we also heard concerns that landowners might withdraw land from tenants to benefit from attractive tree-planting subsidies themselves. There was, however, dispute over evidence of this already occurring. We welcome and encourage continued dialogue between the Tenant Farmers Association and Country Land & Business Association on tree planting. We recommend that Defra include within the new Tenancy Working Groups’s remit how to find practical and equitable ways to enable more tenant farmers to contribute to England’s tree-planting ambition.**

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292 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Press release: New working group launched to support tenant farmers](#) (accessed 23 February 2022). Amongst the Group’s objectives are to provide independent advice on “how Defra can use scheme design to facilitate participation of and benefits to tenant farmers in new Government ELMs and related schemes.”

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Tree planting targets

1. We welcome the UK Government's ambition to plant 30,000 hectares of new woodland a year by 2025 in the UK. However, the Government has not set a clear target for England's contribution, which will likely require England to treble its planting rate by May 2024. Setting annual targets for tree planting in England would provide certainty for the sectors whilst improving transparency and accountability. *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)
2. The Government's planting ambition will fail to achieve its net zero, nature recovery and biodiversity goals unless it is able to deliver the principle of planting the 'right tree in the right place'. This requires adequate mapping data available being available to inform planting decisions. Currently there is no clear delivery date to work by the Forestry Commission and Natural England to fill gaps in their data, or for the work on the new national habitat map and Local Nature Recovery Areas (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)
3. However additional mapping information will not, in itself, help local authorities manage the potential trade-offs between tree planting, creating and conserving other habitats and the needs of farmers and food production when developing Local Nature Recovery Strategies. *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)

## Incentivising tree planting

4. The financial incentives the Government is providing must make it economically viable to plant trees. The overall direction of travel is laudable, and the interim English Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) provides better incentives than previous schemes. However, getting to net zero may be held up by a lack of progress and clarity on the Government's Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes, and how the EWCO and ELM schemes will fit together. *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 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)
5. Much of England's existing woodland is under-managed and in poor condition. The Government's objectives for net zero, nature recovery and biodiversity depend on existing woodland being much better managed. This will only happen if effective

financial incentives are in place, but the Government's has missed an opportunity with its new incentives to change the model for woodland management, by leaving a gap between when subsidies end, after ten years, and the start of income generation after around 20 years. *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)

6. The Minister told us that the £500m allocated by the Government to woodland creation and management from 2020 to 2025 wouldn't be enough to realise the Government ambitions, and it is not clear whether the extra funding committed in the Spending Review will fill the gaps identified by the Minister. *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)
7. Increasing domestic timber production and consumption can provide an additional revenue stream to support tree-planting, whilst helping to store carbon and reduce the UK's reliance on timber imports, which contributes to overseas deforestation. While we welcome the steps the Government is taking to boost domestic production and increase the use of wood in construction, progress to date has been very limited. *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)
8. While strengthening the demand for domestic timber may help the UK to meet its international commitment to end and reverse deforestation caused by UK businesses by 2030, it is only a small part of the solution. While not a central part of this inquiry, it also appeared to us that stronger action may be needed to stop UK-based financial institutions from supporting and profiting from any activity that is causing deforestation. We may return to look at this issue in a future inquiry. (Paragraph 57)

### Delivering tree planting

9. Tree nursery representatives and the Forestry Commission told us that nurseries in the UK will struggle to expand production to deliver the number of young trees required for the Government to achieve its planting ambitions by the end of this Parliament. We believe that the Government should aim to meet all UK planting needs from domestically grown trees. To achieve this the Government needs to give the sector greater confidence to invest and expand production, given that it can take up to four years to grow the trees required for planting. *We reiterate our recommendation that the UK Government set annual targets for the number*

*of trees that will be planted in England, which we believe would greatly help the sectors' confidence in the Government's commitment to tree planting. We also ask the Government to update us on progress establishing a confidential information sharing system with nurseries, and on the outcomes of the £10m invested via the tree production innovation fund. (Paragraph 64)*

10. We were given reassurances that the closure of one of two Forestry England nurseries will not affect the overall ability of the nursery sector to produce enough trees. Given the challenges facing the sector, however, reducing the UK's nursery capacity indicates a lack of policy co-ordination. We remain concerned about the additional pressure the closure may place on the sector and the possible reduction in our ability to manage risks to tree health. *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)*
11. To meet the Government's tree planting goals, we are going to need to import seeds and young trees until domestic capacity increases. This carries the risks of pests and diseases being introduced. We welcome the work Defra and the Forestry Commission are doing to tighten biosecurity and the additional funding that has been provided to support this work. However, we heard concerns that delays in introducing checks at the border, with checks instead occurring at the place of destination, increases the risk of pests and diseases being spread before they are detected. *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)*
12. The lack of a sufficiently large skilled workforce is a key barrier to England's tree planting ambitions. Addressing this requires a well-funded and planned workforce and skills strategy. Defra and the Forestry Commission are working to address the issue, but work is in the early stages and looks unlikely to deliver the immediate improvement needed, particularly in woodland creation roles that need to increase by over 75%. *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)*
13. We welcome the Government's extension of the Seasonal Workers Pilot to the ornamental sector which should go some way to addressing the immediate labour shortage facing the sector. *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)*

14. The application and approvals process for tree planting is seen as too bureaucratic by land-owning and forestry organisations. While we understand the importance of not weakening the environmental controls, there appears to be a consensus that it is possible to speed up the approval process by improving administration, guidance and advice. While the Government has provided additional resources for the Forestry Commission and Natural England, it needs to ensure that funding keeps pace with the likely increase in application numbers and requests for advice and support. *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)
15. The current permanency rules discourage farmers and landowners from engaging with tree planting for fear that they will never be able to change the land use back to growing crops or grazing if the new woodland does not prove viable. While we recognise the need to maintain and develop the national timber reserve, this does not mean that the rules have to apply to new woodland growth on farmland. *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)
16. We heard concerns that legal restrictions on many tenancies and their short-term length will prevent many tenant farmers from engaging in tree-planting. Conversely, we also heard concerns that landowners might withdraw land from tenants to benefit from attractive tree-planting subsidies themselves. There was, however, dispute over evidence of this already occurring. We welcome and encourage continued dialogue between the Tenant Farmers Association and Country Land & Business Association on tree planting. *We recommend that Defra include within the new Tenancy Working Groups's remit how to find practical and equitable ways to enable more tenant farmers to contribute to England's tree-planting ambition.* (Paragraph 102)

# Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 8 March 2022**

## **Members present:**

Neil Parish, in the Chair

Ian Byrne

Dr Neil Hudson

Robbie Moore

Mrs Sheryll Murray

Derek Thomas

Draft Report (*Tree planting*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 102 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

## **Adjournment**

[Adjourned till Tuesday 15 March at 2.00 p.m.]

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Tuesday 9 March 2021

**Amanda Thomson**, Lead Scientist, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology; **Professor Ian Bateman**, Professor of Environmental Economics, University of Exeter; **Jim Mackinnon CBE**, Former Chief Planner and Director for the Built Environment at Scottish Government

[Q1–63](#)

### Tuesday 15 June 2021

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

[Q64–100](#)

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

[Q101–128](#)

### Tuesday 13 July 2021

**Jill Butler**, Director and Chair, Forest of Selwood Community Interest Company; **Robin Gray**, Development and Funding Officer, National Association of AONBs; **Dr Darren Moorcroft**, Chief Executive Officer, The Woodland Trust

[Q129–155](#)

**Melanie Baines**, Student Member, The United Kingdom Environmental Law Association; **Jenna Hegarty**, Deputy Director for Policy and Advocacy, Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB); **Emi Murphy**, Campaign Lead, Friends of the Earth

[Q156–181](#)

### Tuesday 14 September 2021

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

[Q182–213](#)

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

[Q214–237](#)

### Tuesday 23 November 2021

**The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith**, Minister for Pacific and the Environment at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; **Edward Barker**, Director, Natural Environment, Trees and Landscapes, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

[Q238–333](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

TPW numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 A1 ([TPW0070](#))
- 2 Airborne Allergy Action ([TPW0077](#))
- 3 Allen, Martin (Botanical consultant, Self-employed) ([TPW0001](#))
- 4 Ancient Tree Forum ([TPW0066](#))
- 5 Arboricultural Association ([TPW0048](#))
- 6 Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) ([TPW0019](#))
- 7 Association of Tree Officers ([TPW0029](#))
- 8 BSW Timber Group ([TPW0078](#))
- 9 Barker, Bob (retired, Private) ([TPW0007](#))
- 10 Bateman, Professor Ian ([TPW0085](#))
- 11 Bateman, Professor Ian (Director, Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute (LEEP), Department of Economics, University of Exeter Business School. , University of Exeter) ([TPW0030](#))
- 12 Bellamy, Mr Richard (Sole Practitioner, Bellamy Rural) ([TPW0049](#))
- 13 Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BIFoR) at the University of Birmingham ([TPW0045](#))
- 14 Bright Blue ([TPW0006](#))
- 15 Caithness, Earl Malcolm ([TPW0021](#))
- 16 City of London Corporation ([TPW0080](#))
- 17 Claxon, Mr. Richard (Woodlands Manager, Peak District National Park Authority) ([TPW0014](#))
- 18 Confor ([TPW0089](#))
- 19 Confor ([TPW0090](#))
- 20 Confor - promoting forestry and wood ([TPW0003](#))
- 21 Davis, Mr Terry ([TPW0063](#))
- 22 Defra and Forestry Commission ([TPW0050](#))
- 23 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ([TPW0093](#))
- 24 Ebley, Richard ([TPW0018](#))
- 25 FSC UK ([TPW0028](#))
- 26 Ferry, Mr Tim (Voluntary Trustee, Moor Trees (www.moortrees.org)) ([TPW0005](#))
- 27 Ford, Mrs Judith (PhD Student, University of Leeds) ([TPW0020](#))
- 28 Forest School Association ([TPW0076](#))
- 29 Forest of Selwood Community Interest Company ([TPW0081](#))
- 30 Forestry Commission ([TPW0087](#))

- 31 Friends of Meon Vale Woodland Walk ([TPW0053](#))
- 32 Friends of the Dales ([TPW0008](#))
- 33 Friends of the Earth ([TPW0016](#))
- 34 Friends of the Lake District ([TPW0022](#))
- 35 Fyfe, Mrs Fiona (Director, Fiona Fyfe Associates Ltd.) ([TPW0079](#))
- 36 Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust ([TPW0047](#))
- 37 Green Alliance ([TPW0071](#))
- 38 Harding, Mr John (Retired Professional, Her Majesty's Government) ([TPW0026](#))
- 39 Heald, Andrew ([TPW0073](#))
- 40 Historic England ([TPW0038](#))
- 41 Horticultural Trades Association ([TPW0094](#))
- 42 Horticultural Trades Association ([TPW0058](#))
- 43 Institute of Chartered Foresters ([TPW0036](#))
- 44 James Hutton Institute ([TPW0041](#))
- 45 Kirby, Dr Keith (Visiting researcher, Department of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford) ([TPW0009](#))
- 46 Lake District National Park Partnership ( made up of 25 partner organisations) ([TPW0039](#))
- 47 Lonsdale, Dr David ([TPW0051](#))
- 48 McEwan, Dr Kirsten (Senior Research Fellow, University of Derby) ([TPW0061](#))
- 49 Naiad Environmental Consultancy ([TPW0012](#))
- 50 National Association of AONBs; and Forest of Bowland AONB ([TPW0069](#))
- 51 National Farmers Union ([TPW0035](#))
- 52 National Forest Company ([TPW0057](#))
- 53 National Parks England ([TPW0042](#))
- 54 National Small Woods Association ([TPW0043](#))
- 55 National Tree Improvement Strategy (NTIS) ([TPW0017](#))
- 56 National Trust ([TPW0031](#))
- 57 Natural England ([TPW0088](#))
- 58 Natural England ([TPW0024](#))
- 59 Northumberland County Council ([TPW0034](#))
- 60 Nottingham City Council ([TPW0002](#))
- 61 OVO Energy ([TPW0060](#))
- 62 Oaks, Ms Rebecca (Woodland Adviser, Self-employed) ([TPW0074](#))
- 63 Ohlsen, Julian ([TPW0092](#))
- 64 Pennine Forestry Ltd ([TPW0052](#))
- 65 Pennine Prospects ([TPW0075](#))
- 66 RSPB ([TPW0064](#))
- 67 Rewilding Britain ([TPW0027](#))

- 68 Royal Forestry Society ([TPW0084](#))
- 69 Royal Horticultural Society ([TPW0040](#))
- 70 Soil Association ([TPW0037](#))
- 71 Southworth, Kate ([TPW0046](#))
- 72 Spen Valley Civic Society ([TPW0011](#))
- 73 Tenant Farmers Association ([TPW0025](#))
- 74 The CLA ([TPW0059](#))
- 75 The Horticultural Trades Association ([TPW0091](#))
- 76 The Horticultural Trades Association ([TPW0086](#))
- 77 The Landworkers' Alliance ([TPW0054](#))
- 78 The Ramblers ([TPW0032](#))
- 79 The Wildlife Trusts ([TPW0010](#))
- 80 The Wood Panel Industries Federation ([TPW0033](#))
- 81 Trees for Cities ([TPW0062](#))
- 82 UK Environmental Law Association ([TPW0055](#))
- 83 Warmington, Mr Hugh (Owner, Cothelstone Estate) ([TPW0023](#))
- 84 Wildlife & Countryside Link ([TPW0044](#))
- 85 Wood Pasture and Parkland Network; and Peoples Trust for Endangered Species ([TPW0072](#))
- 86 Woodland Trust ([TPW0056](#))
- 87 WoodsfortheTrees.org ([TPW0013](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Session 2021–22

| Number | Title   | Reference |
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| 1st    | Moving animals across borders                                 | HC 79     |
| 2nd    | Environmental Land Management and the agricultural transition | HC 78     |

### Session 2019–21

| Number | Title  | Reference |
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| 1st    | COVID-19 and food supply   | HC 263    |
| 2nd    | Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair-Designate of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) | HC 1042   |
| 3rd    | The UK's new immigration policy and the food supply chain  | HC 231    |
| 4th    | Flooding   | HC 170    |
| 5th    | Air Quality and coronavirus: a glimpse of a different future or business as usual                | HC 468    |
| 6th    | Public Sector Procurement of Food  | HC 469    |
| 7th    | Covid-19 and the issues of security in food supply   | HC 1156   |
| 8th    | Seafood and meat exports to the EU   | HC 1189   |