

# **Jemima Cooper, Policy Manager, Institute of Chartered Foresters – Written Evidence (LUE0021)**

## **1.0 About the Institute**

1.1 The Institute of Chartered Foresters is the Royal Chartered body for tree professionals in the UK. Its membership covers the full range of tree professionals, and this range of expertise is one of its greatest strengths. It has 2,000 members who practise forestry, arboriculture and other related disciplines in the private and third sectors, central and local government, research institutions, universities and colleges throughout the UK. The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession. It provides support to members, guidance to professionals in other sectors, information to the general public, and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers.

## **2.0 Introduction**

2.1 There is now a clear acknowledgement of the significant role trees will play in delivering government ambitions and mitigating the climate and nature crises – for carbon sequestration, biodiversity, flood mitigation, health and wellbeing and many more objectives. Among many competing uses for land in England, we need thriving trees and woodland managed by modern, sustainable forestry practice. We have a unique opportunity at this time of agricultural transition post-EU Exit and heightened awareness of the environmental crisis to ensure that trees and woodland can deliver what we need.

## **3.0 Questions**

### ***Pressures and challenges***

**3.1 What do you see as the most notable current challenges in relation to land use in England? How might these challenges best be tackled? How do you foresee land use in England changing over the long term? How should competing priorities for land use be managed?**

3.1.1 Recognising the need for lots more trees and woodland and government's commitments on tree planting, the three main challenges are

- a. Finding the land for trees, especially without an integrated land use policy
- b. The critical skills shortage
- c. Lack of clarity and join-up of tree planting and management schemes reducing confidence.

3.1.2 Skills<sup>1</sup>

- Recent research studies suggest we need up to a 72% uplift in the workforce to meet targets for tree planting and management
- There is a crisis in education and training with low numbers of students and under-resourced providers<sup>2</sup>
- The shortage is not just in 'pure' forestry roles; we also need allied professionals such as land agents to understand UKFS principles
- Considerable upskilling is needed for farmers and other land managers who will be increasingly involved in tree planting and management
- This includes the need for sound advice through ELM.

### 3.1.3 Incentives and support<sup>3</sup>

- There is a pressing need for schemes to be clear, accessible and joined up with each other
- The lack of certainty is putting people off planting trees – businesses need to be able to plan and have confidence in the long term
- We must make it financially rewarding – the England Woodland Creation Offer is generous but there are other barriers that need addressing
- Schemes like ELM must be clear but also flexible to farmers' needs
- Supporting farmers to plant trees must include addressing cultural barriers and negative media coverage
- There are multiple existing schemes that must be simplified and dovetail with the new offer
- We need to reduce other regulatory barriers and streamline the process such as Environmental Impact Assessments.

### 3.1.4 Long term

- Forestry delivers benefits in the long term, but this takes long-term planning and confidence
- Schemes need to offer support beyond the initial 10 years to enable good management for the long term
- We welcome the proposal in the Nature Recovery Green Paper to remove the permanency of woodland in some cases to help landowners try new approaches like agroforestry
- Ecosystem services markets are immature – landowners are aware of this; it will take time for confidence in them to develop.

### 3.1.5 Working together

- It is critical that there is strategic read-across between different initiatives

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.charteredforesters.org/forestry-skills-crisis-puts-climate-targets-at-risk>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lantra.co.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/Forestry%20Workforce%20Research%20Final%20Report%2013.08.21.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://rfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/woodland-creation-opportunities-and-barriers-020620-embargo-3-june.pdf>

- Governments, departments and even teams need to work together better and not pull in different directions or cause mixed messages – an integrated land use strategy could support this
- Government must work closely with sector organisations, like the Institute, who are poised to support
- There is huge potential in partnerships with local communities – government should learn from good practice such as the Community Forests and enable more partnership working.

### 3.1.6 Role of government

- Spatial mapping has its place but even 'green-lit' areas would be comprised of multiple different landowners which poses challenges
- We need a clear strategy or policy steer as to government priorities which, combined with helpful targets, public funding and good regulation, can guide local action
- As well as this 'top down' approach, local priorities, partnerships and communities have a lot of potential to drive delivery, if appropriately empowered
- We need better education and awareness raising of the benefits of trees and genuine multi-purpose woodlands among the public and media to engender support and draw new entrants to the sector.

### 3.1.7 Supplementary points

- Other challenges include nursery capacity and confidence, and good seed sources
- We must not overlook the importance of managing our existing woodlands, woefully undermanaged at present<sup>4</sup>
- Forestry is a highly skilled endeavour – the role of professional advice should not be undervalued, despite government's ambition to make ELM accessible.

## **3.2 What are the key drivers of land use change which need to be planned for, and how should they be planned for? What is the role of multifunctional land use strategies in implementing these plans?**

- We are all keenly aware of the need to capture carbon and boost biodiversity through sustainable means, for which trees and woodland are a big part of the solution
- There is also an ever-increasing need for timber security and wood products
- We recognise the need for food security and would not suggest taking good agricultural land out of food production
- Modern sustainable forestry creates woodland that can meet several objectives, and it is important not to over-focus on only one outcome<sup>5</sup>, but take a natural capital approach depending on what

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<sup>4</sup> <https://planthealthy.org.uk/assets/downloads/action-plan-for-climate-change-adaptation.pdf>

the site can offer and what the landowner's objectives are

- A land use strategy would support these multiple objectives by setting priorities and identifying areas for land use change.

### **3.3 How might we achieve greater and more effective coordination, integration and delivery of land use policy and management at a central, regional, local and landscape level?**

- As above, government strategy should guide local priorities
- This includes supporting partnerships and collaboration at a local level
- We need to win hearts and minds about the multiple benefits of trees and woodlands, not just to the environment but to businesses, and adopt a 'land-sharing' not 'land-sparing' approach to trees.

#### ***Farming and land management***

### **3.4 What impacts are changes to farming and agricultural practices, including food production, likely to have on land use in England? What is the role of new technology and changing standards of land management?**

- Agricultural transition offers significant opportunities to incentivise changes to agricultural practices and land use and encourage innovation
- This programme needs to be supported by education and upskilling
- We must persuade farmers to plant trees and support them to do this well
- We need to be alive to the sensitivities, that in many places tree planting is perceived as a threat
- Natural regeneration/colonisation and rewilding have their place, but they take a lot of good management and must not be seen as an easy option or silver bullet.

### **3.5 What impact are the forthcoming environmental land management schemes likely to have on agriculture, biodiversity and wellbeing? What do you see as their merits and disadvantages?**

- ELM needs clarity, flexibility and confidence
- It is a genuine opportunity to reduce the negative impacts of farming and benefit from more sustainable approaches
- As with natural regeneration and rewilding, agroforestry has its place but is only part of the solution. It also needs to be better understood by Defra and farmers: it is a means of increasing productivity in the farm system, not just an add-on, but it also needs skilled forestry advice to work<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.confor.org.uk/media/247794/confor-biodiversity-forestry-report.pdf>

## ***Nature, landscape and biodiversity***

### **3.6 What do you see as the key threats to nature and biodiversity in England in the short and longer term, and what role should land use policy have in tackling these?**

- We will inevitably have to make difficult trade-offs, but we cannot be too risk averse with regulation in this time of crisis or we will fail to meet the challenge.
- Government must be bold in addressing threats and enabling opportunities even when these are not immediately popular.

### **3.7 What are the merits and challenges of emerging policies such as nature-based solutions (including eco-system and carbon markets), local nature recovery strategies and the biodiversity net gain requirement? Are these policies compatible, and how can we ensure they support one another, and that they deliver effective benefits for nature?**

- Currently ecosystem services markets are immature and need government support and development to engender confidence
- Local Nature Recovery strategies must align with other land use related policies
- Biodiversity Net Gain, if implemented well, will draw private finance, but is only part of the solution and we cannot replace the irreplaceable when lost through development
- Other policies need to be compatible and work together, whether this is the Woodland Resilience Implementation Plan, Keepers of Time, planning reforms, environmental targets and nature recovery policy.

## ***Environment, climate change, energy and infrastructure***

### **3.8 How will commitments such as the 25-year environment plan and the net zero target require changes to land use in England, and what other impacts might these changes have?**

- We know we need to be doing more – our view is that environmental targets will help, but only if the ‘enablers’ such as sector capacity are properly addressed<sup>6</sup>
- There needs to be a clear steer from government about priorities for land use to meet these commitments.

## ***Land use planning***

### **3.9 What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of the existing land use planning system and associated frameworks**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.soilassociation.org/causes-campaigns/agroforestry/what-is-agroforestry/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-environment-policy/consultation-on-environmental-targets/> page 27

**in England? How effectively does the system manage competing demands on land, including the Government's housing and development objectives? What would be the merits of introducing a formal spatial planning framework or frameworks, and how might it be implemented?**

- Existing land use and planning systems do not help to resolve the competing priorities
- Better spatial planning would be helpful as would a government strategy or policy steer to provide the government's view on local priorities
- Competing options need high-level decisions within government, considered with input from the devolved administrations, and crucially across departments – not just Defra but BEIS and the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities
- However, this must all be supported by proper incentives, skilled people and effective collaboration at every level.

**3.10 What lessons may be learned from land use planning frameworks in the devolved nations and abroad, and how might these lessons apply to England?**

- Scotland benefits from a land use policy framework but importantly also from strong political will and simpler regulation.

### ***Conclusion***

**3.11 Which organisations would be best placed to plan and decide on the allocation of land for the various competing agendas for land use in England, and how should they set about doing so?**

- This must be a joint effort – there is a lot of good work by Forest Research, Forestry Commission, Natural England, local authorities and the devolved administrations, but this needs cohesion.

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