

## TREE PLANTING & WOODLANDS

(House of Commons Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Select Committee – Call  
for Evidence – 19/11/2020.)

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I am making my submission as an individual, not on behalf of my employer, the Peak District National Park Authority, who employ me as their Woodlands Manager charged with caring for its owned and leased woodlands and those managed by agreement.

I am a Chartered Forester of thirty-three years' experience, qualified by degree for the last forty-three years. My background has been in both commercial and conservation forestry: I passionately believe in the marriage of forest conservation with forest utilisation and have actively practised this over the years. I am also an active member of the Royal Forestry Society, for whom I was privileged to judge (as part of a small panel) the James Cup technical articles from their 2016 Journal. I have written articles, reports, etc. for various publications and have reviewed new books for the Institute of Chartered Foresters. Reduction and prevention of flooding by appropriate woodland planting is a particular interest of mine, having experienced the beneficial and adverse effects of afforestation on water-courses, then drafted revised legislation to regulate this in a Commonwealth country. Many years ago, I was the Superintendent's Deputy for Epping Forest (City of London) and the RFS published an article written by me in their Quarterly Journal of Forestry, discussing various woodland management techniques and principles.

I respond to the following questions:

1) Are the UK Government's targets for increasing forestry coverage and tree planting, for England and the UK sufficiently ambitious and realistic?

**Response: Certainly not over-ambitious, but realising such will require radical changes which allow the planting procedures to over-ride all current constraints, with special regard to "flood-fighting forests" in the upper water catchment areas of major rivers and watercourses prone to flooding.**

2) Are the right structures in place to ensure that the UK wide target for increasing forestry coverage is delivered?

**Response: No – see above. Special new priority will be needed to over-ride the constraints which have so badly hindered the UK from reaching its planting targets over the past decade and more.**

3) How effective is the co-ordination between the four nations on forestry issues, including biosecurity, plant health and other cross-border issues?

**Response: Increasing devolution has obviously allowed divergence and this is no bad thing with regard to each nation satisfying its own particular needs. Each will (and should) take care of its own**

biosecurity/plant health needs, but close liaison & co-operation will be needed to cater for, in particular, movement of nursery stock. Supplies of the latter from Canada and the USA are anticipated to meet demand. European and Asian supply (this is based on biosecurity/plant health issues, not politics) should not be accepted in the light of recent plant disease infections.

**4) Why were previous ambitions for increasing tree planting in England not met and what lessons should be learned?**

**Response:** This unhappy state of affairs is fundamental to the whole success of future woodland establishment and especially flood prevention. Deliberate obstruction by self-styled environmentalist zealots became normal practice in the various organisations consulted over any proposed afforestation (forestry had become a dirty word.) This resulted as a reaction to over-enthusiastic planting in the 1970's for tax relief purposes. However, "the pendulum swung too far" and even now, the mantra "broadleaves good, conifers bad" is still believed by many in key positions. Vast areas of open ground exist and those in the vicinity of the upper reaches of major watercourses and their feeding tributaries must – of absolute necessity – be afforested. Rapid flood reduction is required, access to the forest must be facilitated at establishment. Future natural regeneration will also result to ensure perpetuation of these forests with their multiple benefits – namely reducing and regulating rainfall run-off (by acting as a sponge, also using water in evapo-transpiration and photosynthesis,) trapping atmospheric carbon at a high rate and stimulating the rural economy in the long-term as well as short-term.

Conifers are very necessary in afforestation which is designed to control, *effectively*, excess rainfall run-off and to trap carbon at a high rate. Evergreen trees (conifers & some broadleaves) maintain a slight "drawing effect" on groundwater during winter, whereas leafless, deciduous trees cannot do so in winter, which is when some heavy, prolonged rainfall can occur.

**5) In relation to increasing forestry coverage in England, what should the Government be trying to achieve? For example, how should the following policy objectives be prioritised?**

- Mitigating or adapting to climate change;

**Response:** Planting a diverse range of species (many native broadleaves and some non-native conifers are suffering from a plethora of diseases and pests) will indeed, accommodate future climatic change, but can also be used (given a high degree of professional knowledge and experience) to establish resilient woods capable of withstanding future changes and simultaneously reducing flooding. If the latter is emphasised, the former will also be achieved.

- Promoting biodiversity and nature recovery;

**Response:** Again, this can be easily achieved by wise but daring, bold afforestation. Just establishing the woodland microclimate by afforestation creates a multitude of habitats in a short time.

- Increasing biosecurity and plant health;

**Response:** Diversity increases biosecurity and plant health.

- Improving human well-being and health;

**Response:** Conifer plantations have a stimulating effect on human health (P.Wohlleben, "Hidden Life of Trees") and even broadleaved woods can do so, but mixtures are even better.

- Protecting natural and cultural heritage;

Response: Planting should not be done where obvious cultural heritage is threatened (disgraceful examples occurred, some of which were reversed at great cost to the public purse.) Most such threats are obvious, but sometimes a contrived threat to long-buried archaeology should not stop much-needed tree planting.

- Food security;

Response: most land to be planted would be upland of very low agricultural potential. Even some lower farms would be better utilised by forests.

- Creating commercial opportunities from forestry, tourism and recreation;

Response: This is the beauty of afforestation – not only is rainfall run-off reduced in times of heavy downpours, but it is maintained during short dry periods, giving steady flows. Also, carbon dioxide is trapped at the same rate that oxygen is replaced into the atmosphere by photosynthesis; in the process, wood is produced as a useful material to be continually harvested by thinnings under continuous cover forestry. In addition, the woodland ambiance is wonderfully therapeutic to visitors and those wishing to pursue outdoor pursuits.

and

- Any other priorities?

Response: Yes – I start and end with flood reduction. 2019 saw truly horrible flooding of English towns and farmland, with awful psychological effects as well as economic ones and actual loss of life.

6) 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?

Response: Re-introduction of the beaver is an example of very limited, even blinkered, short-term thinking without an appreciation of the wider, long-term effects of this. Ideas of rewilding may sound good, but do they adequately take account of the differences – now or in the future – between a continental climate and a maritime one such as we experience, or, indeed the network of rail and roads riddling an island (mainland Britain) with a population of around 67 million people?

If you are submitting evidence on behalf of an organisation, please be sure to select that option. The submission form will still give you the option to enter your own name and contact details.

In order to promote openness and transparency, the Committee will normally only accept anonymous or confidential evidence where there is a good reason. If you would like to request anonymity, or that your evidence is kept confidential, please include your reasons for the request at the beginning of your evidence.

I was originally considering remaining anonymous, as the above is not part of the National Parks' submission, but I passionately believe there must be a fundamental shift in thinking to achieve the Statutory Purposes set out in the National Park Act and to execute its Statutory Duty to foster the economic and social well-being of Park communities. My proposals and submissions would, I contend, work towards achieving both these worthy goals, also giving wider benefits environmentally, socially and economically.

Richard Claxon.