

Written evidence submitted by Professor Ian J. Bateman OBE, FBA, FRSA, FRSB, University of Exeter Business School (TPW0030)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/262/tree-planting-and-woodlands/>

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

The Defra Climate and Forestry executive have announced what they have described in internal documents as “the biggest tree planting programme this country has ever seen” (source on request) reaching 30,000ha of tree planting per annum by 2025. The speed of this transition is extremely ambitious and, while feasible, will require major and rapid changes in public financial support if they are to be attained within such a period. This speed of change will be a major challenge unless a much more joined-up approach is adopted, for example by integrating this objective within the Defra Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme established under the Agriculture Bill. Without the level of incentive provided by such (or similar) support it is not obvious that such ambition is realistic. This is of concern. Most tree species take many years to attain their maximum annual carbon storage with the early post-planting years being a period of low sequestration. For trees to play a major role in fulfilling the 2050 net zero commitment rapid action is needed but this will be challenging.

Aside from the rapid speed of this proposed change, its target level of planting might, on the surface, also appear ambitious, especially when set against recent planting trends. This is particularly true with respect to public sector, especially within England, where only a very small fraction of this level has been attained. However, taking a longer-term perspective back to the 1970s shows that such levels are eminently feasible, particularly in partnership with the private sector.

Therefore, while the final target is attainable, it will require joined-up governance, substantial funding, and urgent action to ensure delivery within the net zero commitment timescale. The best time to have started this programme is previously; the longer we delay the more true this becomes.

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

Frankly, no.

We are coming out of 50-year period of retrenchment in forestry which has stripped knowledge (and budget) out of the sector. The break-up of the Forestry Commission across the Devolved Administrations has made coordination unwieldy and introduced a range of competing national issues and objectives. It now seems unlikely that there will be a coordinated response to the net zero challenge even across the UK; a poor state of affairs for a global problem which can only be met by international cooperation.

Accepting this unfortunate starting point there is a need for the DAs to meet this challenge as equal partners. However, this cannot be confined just to the forestry sector; this is a wider land use issue

and will require coordination across policy areas – most particularly between forestry and agriculture.

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

The trends are going towards less rather than greater integration and coordination. For example, organisations such as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), which has a very explicit, Parliamentary prescribed remit to integrate across the nations of the UK, have been defunded for years now and the downward trend in Grant In Aid shows no sign of abating. Despite this, the existence of organisation like JNCC and the Forestry Commission itself does provide the essential institutional infrastructure to necessary to deliver integration if the DAs are prepared to work together on this.

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

One-word answer: Money

While the funding answer is a slight simplification, it covers the bulk of the issue. The level of land use change required to attain net zero simply cannot be delivered by goodwill and even grant aided forestry cannot compete with subsidised agriculture for land across the UK. If it could we would not be in this situation.

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. Of course the upside of this situation is that, if the financial returns to woodland were to change then, despite protestations to the contrary, there is no reason to suspect that the land sector would not deliver the woodland we need. Indeed, the work of numerous LEEP colleagues through our network of nearly 2,000 farms across the UK shows a willingness, indeed enthusiasm for engaging in farm forestry if only the financial conditions were right.

Storage of greenhouse gases is a public good. Farmers cannot sell this good in the market. However, the timely arrival of the Public Money for Public Goods principle within the new Agriculture Bill provides the ability to switch funding away from the production targets of the EU Common Agricultural Policy towards delivery of greenhouse gas storage. Farm subsidies are under long term threat but can be more than justified if retargeted in this way.

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;**
- **Promoting biodiversity and nature recovery;**
- **Increasing biosecurity and plant health;**
- **Improving human well-being and health;**

- **Protecting natural and cultural heritage;**
- **Food security;**
- **Creating commercial opportunities from forestry, tourism and recreation; and**
- **Any other priorities?**

Forests are truly unique in that, when established in the right locations, using the right species mix and are managed in the right way, they can deliver an unparalleled variety of important benefits simultaneously.

Therefore, I feel that the premise of this question is incorrect and should instead be asking how we structure and implement woodland in a way to deliver the best mix of potential benefits.

An implementation question concerns how we measure the diverse values which woodland can deliver and ensure that we consider alternative options for planting which address this wider question. As a member of the Natural Capital Committee I feel that the Government now has the guidance it requires for this in the form of the HM Treasury Green Book which provides clear principles for the appraisal of spending proposals. Furthermore, we now have the tools to undertake these appraisals, considering different options in different locations to identify the Right Tree for the Right Place. The Defra ELMs programme uses the LEEP NEVO tool (available for free at <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/leep/> or directly at <https://www.leep.exeter.ac.uk/nevo/?x=405000&y=410000&z=1>) which embraces all of the benefits listed above and shows how each changes as we consider different planting in different locations so that the best mix of planting can be identified. Adopting such principles and tools will allow decision makers to address multiple targets (net zero, biodiversity goals, the 25 Year Environment Plan objectives) and deliver high value for money to taxpayers.

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?

At present; no. However, while policy integration across the UK is degrading, within each country initiatives are beginning to set out strategies for attaining policy goals. Within England the framework necessary to deliver change is evolving well and really just needs political will to be applied in practice.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan adopts the 'natural capital approach' (Bateman and Mace, 2020) underpinning provides the framework necessary to deliver the Environment White Paper pledge to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better condition than it inherited. The legal force of the Environment Bill coupled with the implementation guidance of the HM Treasury Green Book provides the conditions necessary to undertake the woodland planting and greenhouse gas removal commensurate with net zero.

However, this does not address the funding issue. While the private sector can be incentivised to play a part here, the last 50 years shows that it will not occur at the scale necessary without state aid. Ideally this would come directly from climate change budgets. However, some are sceptical that this will occur. If this was the case then the Public Money for Public Goods principles of the new Agriculture Bill provide an obvious source of such funding. This could readily be designed to co-

deliver a variety of other allied benefits, including those that arise from planting the Right Tree in the Right Place but also removing many of the negative aspects for current agricultural land use and addressing concerns regarding income security and potential hardship in farming (Bateman and Balmford, 2019).

References:

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