

Written evidence submitted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission (FC) (TPW0050)

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Introduction

1. This is a joint Defra and Forestry Commission (FC) written evidence submission for the EFRA Committee inquiry into tree planting and woodlands.
2. FC is a non-ministerial government department. FC provides expertise in advising Ministers on forestry matters and implementing forestry policy through a combination of guidance, advice, regulation of sustainable forest management and woodland creation, and the delivery of forestry grants. FC has two executive agencies:
 - Forestry England (which is also a public corporation) manages over 250,000 hectares (ha) of the Nation's Forests.
 - Forest Research is Great Britain's principal organisation for forestry and tree related research and is internationally renowned for the provision of evidence and scientific services in support of sustainable forestry.
3. The Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 came into force on 1 April 2019, repealing the Forestry Act 1967 and devolving Scottish forestry matters to Scotland¹. Since 2013 forestry functions in Wales have been carried out by Natural Resources Wales; a statutory body established by the Natural Resources Body for Wales (Establishment) Order 2012. Functions were transferred to Natural Resources Wales from FC by the Natural Resources Body for Wales (Functions) Order 2013². In Northern Ireland, the Forest Service was established as an agency on 1 April 1998 and leads on Northern Ireland forestry matters³ outlined in the Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 2010⁴. This evidence submission will present Government policy and forestry matters related to both England and, in response to specific inquiry questions and where appropriate, to the UK.
4. The UK has 3.2m ha of woodland (2.3m ha privately owned), 1.3m ha of which is located in England (1.1m ha privately owned)⁵. Tree canopy cover associated with small woods (less than half a hectare), linear features, groups of trees and individual trees accounts for a further 0.565m ha in England⁶. The Nation's

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/forestry/>

² <https://law.gov.wales/environment/forestry/?lang=en#/environment/forestry/?tab=overview&lang=en>

³ <https://lordslibrary.Parliament.uk/research-briefings/lln-2019-0066/#:~:text=mark%20the%20centenary,-,Current%20Arrangements,Forestry%20Commission's%20functions%20in%20Wales.>

⁴ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/niu/2010/10/pdfs/niu_20100010_en.pdf

⁵ <https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2020/1-woodland-area-and-planting/>

Forests, managed by Forestry England, covers over 0.25m ha, 0.215m ha of which is woodland⁷ (16% of England's woodland area), with the remaining area utilised as open space or for other land uses.

5. The UK's and England's trees and woodlands are a crucial asset providing numerous environmental, social and economic benefits. Their carbon sequestration supports efforts towards net zero, their habitats help to recover nature and promote biodiversity, and their economic contribution supports a green economy through providing timber and wood products. They are integral to our long term environmental vision, set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan (YEP) and will contribute to the Nature Recovery Network of wildlife-rich places.
6. The Government is committed to protecting, expanding and improving our woodlands and forests. Defra and FC are working alongside a number of delivery partners in the public and private sector to increase tree planting in England over this Parliament, supporting delivery of the manifesto commitment to increase tree planting across the UK to 30,000ha per year by 2025. We are also working with other departments to ensure all new streets are tree-lined.
7. The Government is also committed to developing innovative ideas to protect and improve our woodlands and the environment as a whole, setting an ambition to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than it was found in. This will require approaches that are designed to be implemented on national, regional and local scales.
8. We recently consulted the public on proposals for inclusion in a new England Tree Strategy (ETS). Following analysis of responses to the consultation, the ETS will be published in early 2021 and will outline mechanisms to deliver our commitments in England. This Strategy will set out policy changes and proposals to increase tree planting rates, protect, restore and improve our existing trees and woodlands, connect people with nature, and support the economy. It will support the ambitions of the 25 YEP, and work alongside other strategies and schemes for the natural environment including: the England Peat Strategy, the Nature Strategy, Tree Health Resilience Strategy⁸ and Environmental Land Management.

⁶

https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/2698/FR_Tree_cover_outside_woodland_in_GB_summary_report_2017.pdf

⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596766/climate-adrep-forestry-commission.pdf

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tree-health-resilience-strategy-2018>

9. The £640m Nature for Climate Fund will support delivery of increased tree planting in England throughout this Parliament. We are currently developing plans to deploy this funding. In addition to Defra Arms' Length Bodies (ALBs), we will work with a number of delivery partners, including local authorities and third sector organisations. This will be done through both national schemes, and through successful woodland creation partnerships between Government, local authorities, local organisations, businesses and private investors at local and regional levels. This will build capability and resilience in the sector, helping to increase and sustain tree planting rates in this Parliament and beyond to contribute towards achieving net zero by 2050.
10. Tree planting, woodland creation and the maintenance and protection of these assets are long term investments, but ones which provides substantial returns environmentally, socially and economically. The Government is therefore committed to exploring how policy, regulation, guidance and other mechanisms can help utilise public funding effectively and successfully; whilst also enabling greater private investment into trees and their many benefits.

Q1. Are the UK Government's targets for increasing forestry coverage, and tree planting, for England and the UK sufficiently ambitious and realistic?

11. The commitment to increase tree planting rates across the UK to 30,000 ha per year by 2025 is ambitious and necessary to meet national objectives, including net zero by 2050 and biodiversity and nature recovery ambitions. This will be a historic, national effort to increase tree planting, and will be made possible by a range of policy and funding mechanisms.
12. When considering targets for land use of any kind it is important to consider environmental, social and economic factors, including population density and other land uses. It is also important to consider the objectives and process of woodland creation, so that as well as planting the right trees in the right place, they are planted for the right reason and successfully established.

Collaboration

13. The 25 YEP marked a step-change in government's ambition for the natural environment, including for woodland creation as a contributor to natural capital, alongside other benefits for biodiversity, nature recovery, water quality and flood risk management⁹.
14. To help meet our UK-wide commitment, planting rates in England must increase significantly. This will require collective effort and delivery by the public and

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

private sectors, including government, charities, landowners, farmers, land managers, local businesses and stakeholder groups. This will need to be underpinned by adequate resources – of land, trees, and people. So we must build up the capacity and resilience of the sector, for example by supporting tree nurseries to provide healthy saplings, and developing a skilled workforce to plan, plant and manage woodlands into the future.

Policy and legislation

15. The Environment Bill¹⁰ sets the legislative framework for domestic delivery of the Government's manifesto commitment to the most ambitious environmental programme of any country. This will build on progress towards achieving the long-term vision of the 25 YEP and help tackle some of the serious challenges that remain.
16. As noted in a public paper in August this year¹¹, we are exploring whether a statutory target for trees in England would be appropriate, as part of the target setting process introduced by the Bill. The paper outlines how any environmental targets that are developed will be done through a robust, evidence-led process that seeks independent expert advice, provides a role for stakeholders and the public, as well as scrutiny from Parliament. Such evidence will be critical to refine any potential environmental targets and how they are to be met, and will require sufficient investment in research and evidence programmes.
17. The Environment Bill will also create a new statutory cycle of monitoring, planning and reporting. Interim targets will be set out in an Environmental Improvement Plan, which will be reviewed at a minimum every 5 years. The 25 YEP will become the first of these Environmental Improvement Plans. The Government will report annually on steps we have taken to implement the current Environmental Improvement Plan and if the natural environment, or specific areas of it, has improved. The Government will also separately consider the progress that has been made towards meeting relevant targets in these annual reports. This will be relevant if any statutory tree targets are deemed appropriate for England.

Carbon sequestration

18. The Government's manifesto commitment is to increase tree planting across the UK to 30,000ha per year by 2025. This reflects and was informed by the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) advice¹² that the UK should increase

¹⁰ <https://services.Parliament.uk/Bills/2019-21/environment/documents.html>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-bill-2020/august-2020-environment-bill-environmental-targets>

planting rates to between 30,000 and 50,000ha per year and maintain this to 2050 to help reach net zero emissions, equating approximately to an increase of UK forestry cover from 13% to 17% by 2050. Reaching this planting rate by 2025 is ambitious but one we are committed to achieving.

19. The manifesto commitment is ambitious, and will support carbon budget targets by bolstering the forestry sink for carbon dioxide – which will decline without action. The UK's 2019 Energy and Emissions Projections¹³ published in October this year indicate that the UK's forests are projected to be a declining sink for carbon dioxide, falling from 17.4 MtCO₂e per year in 2020 to 10.5 MtCO₂e per year in 2050, in the absence of new policies being implemented to accelerate planting. Equivalent figures for England are a sink of 8.2 MtCO₂e per year in 2020 falling to 3.9 MtCO₂e per year in 2050. This decline is largely a result of many of the woodlands planted in the 1960s and 1980s maturing and reaching harvesting age.
20. The rate of decline can be reduced by accelerating planting rates, highlighting the necessity of our commitment. To maximise carbon uptake, the species planted need to be well suited to the site and planted at sufficient density to establish a thriving woodland. The method of establishment also needs to minimise disturbance, particularly on organic soils, to limit release of carbon. Consequently, tree planting rates by themselves do not correlate directly with a contribution to carbon sequestration and abatement. The nature of the woodland planted, its method of establishment and aftercare (including weed and deer management) are equally important.
21. Afforestation is recognised^{14 15} as a mature 'negative emission technology' to help meet carbon budgets by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. It is also considered cost-effective because of the multiple benefits trees and woodlands can provide, such as improving air and water quality, providing wildlife habitat, space for recreation and natural flood management.

Land use

¹² <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/land-use-policies-for-a-net-zero-uk/>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/energy-and-emissions-projections>

¹⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/47613/3702-the-carbon-plan-delivering-our-low-carbon-future.pdf

¹⁵

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928005/government-response-to-ccc-progress-report-2020.pdf

22. It is vital that we appropriately balance the needs for land, including for development, farming, peat and other habitats. With many sectors requiring space from a finite land availability, our manifesto commitment for UK-wide tree planting is ambitious.
23. Balancing these interests in our land use decision making will be important, as will be spotting opportunities where woodland creation and management can be integrated with other objectives to deliver multiple benefits. Government supported woodland creation is expected to conform to the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) which in turn requires compliance with other land use regulations and policies, including Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations¹⁶ and policies on natural habitats. Whilst creating new woodlands contributes to these policy objectives¹⁷, we should avoid planting on land where adverse impacts would outweigh the benefits, so we can contribute to realising our tree planting manifesto commitment but not at the expense of other land uses.
24. With national ambition to increase tree planting, we are developing methods to map and prioritise areas for woodlands creation, for example through the Low Risk map for woodland creation, and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) which will be introduced by the Environment Bill. These Strategies will cover the whole of England, mapping valuable existing habitat for nature and creating proposals for creating and improving habitat – encouraging land management and use for environmental goals, including through tree planting¹⁸, and helping to realise our UK-wide manifesto commitment.

Q2. Are the right structures in place to ensure that the UK wide target for increasing forestry coverage is delivered?

25. *The information provided to ‘Q2’ primarily relates to measures in England. Coordination with the devolved administrations is covered predominantly in ‘Q3’.*
26. The UK is faced by the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change, and our UK-wide planting commitment is key to our response. Forestry is a devolved policy matter, allowing for policies to be tailored to each nation’s needs. We therefore keep close relationships with the devolved administrations on environmental matters, including high ambitions in each nation to increase tree planting. In England, we are exploring and developing new and improved

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/environmental-impact-assessments-for-woodland-overview>

¹⁷ <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/uk-bap/#the-uk-post-2010-biodiversity-framework>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-bill-2020/10-march-2020-nature-and-conservation-covenants-parts-6-and-7>

policies and implementing funding to increase and maintain tree planting rates and meet our commitments.

Strategy

27. The ETS will set out a long-term vision for trees in England and the policy and strategic route to achieving that vision. Defra consulted on the Strategy from July to September this year¹⁹ to understand the views and ideas of the public about potential policies. The strategy, due to be published in early 2021, will set out policy priorities to deliver our ambitious tree planting programme. It will focus on expanding, protecting and improving our woodlands, and how trees and woodlands can connect people to nature, support the economy, combat climate change and recover biodiversity. This will ensure that trees are established and managed for the many benefits they provide for people, the economy, the climate and nature itself.

Funding

28. The £640m Nature for Climate Fund is the key public sector funding for tree planting in England over this Parliament. This fund was allocated to Defra in the Spring 2020 Budget²⁰ to support increased tree planting and peat restoration.

29. The Nature for Climate Fund will build on existing government grants and incentives to support tree planting and woodland creation planning^{21 22} in England. All Government support for woodland creation requires that new woodlands are compliant with the UKFS and receive consent to plant, where required, under the terms of the EIA (Forestry) Regulations 1999, ensuring that woodland is not planted in inappropriate locations. There is also support for tree planting in urban areas through the Urban Tree Challenge Fund²³. Many of these grants require an element of private finance as well as the provision of the land for planting, encouraging the blending of public and private investment.

30. Delivery in England will be overseen by a new England Tree Planting Programme (ETPP), led by Defra and FC, but working in partnerships with other

¹⁹ <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/england-tree-strategy/>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2020-documents/budget-2020>

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/create-woodland-overview>

²²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/844836/Woodland_grants_and_incentives_overview_table_-_Nov._2019.pdf

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund>

Defra ALBs and delivery partners. This programme will seek to support creation of new woodlands by bringing together improved grants, incentives, guidance and regulatory processes. In developing an improved woodland creation offer we will seek to combine adequate financial support, good guidance and simpler processes to access grants. We will consult with the sector on developments and streamlining of processes for securing regulatory consents to plant, while respecting the need for adequate controls to avoid, for example, environmental harm.

31. Through the ETPP we will deliver the tree planting and management aspects of our policy and funding mechanisms. We will combine tried and tested approaches with a range of innovative new methodologies where appropriate, such as through riparian planting and natural colonisation. New woodland creation partnerships will also be created to secure the benefits that trees and woodland provide and helping to create opportunities to leverage the private and other investment needed to sustain the increased level of tree planting required to meet long-term planting ambition. Blending approaches in this way balances planting and managing trees as quickly as possible with implementing new ways of working, to build a trajectory that delivers on ambition.
32. As tree planting rates need to increase in this Parliament and beyond to meet net zero, we are also looking at funding beyond this Parliament. We therefore continue to develop a new Environmental Land Management scheme which will remunerate landowners for delivering environmental public goods. In the longer-term the establishment of trees will be an important pillar of Environmental Land Management, which is replacing the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Our departure from the EU and the CAP provides us with an opportunity to reconsider the design of our policies to meet environmental ambitions, while simultaneously supporting our farming sector.
33. Environmental Land Management will operate on the basis of payments for public goods, and we will be working hard to ensure the support it offers aligns with existing grants and funding so there is a consistent offer of support. Environmental Land Management will be fully rolled out in 2024. We are currently undertaking a programme of tests and trials to design the Environmental Land Management scheme with stakeholders and to help develop and improve the policy framework and delivery mechanisms. They will help us understand how Environmental Land Management could work in a real life environment. We will continue to refine the scheme through a National Pilot that will begin in 2021, providing an important opportunity for farmers, foresters and other land managers to be involved in further shaping the scheme.

34. As already noted, we must also attract private investment if we are to meet our tree planting and net zero ambitions. The Government continues to explore ways beyond guidance and grant schemes to achieve this. For example, the 25 YEP committed to consider a Natural Environment Impact Fund to stimulate private sector financing through market mechanisms which accurately and appropriately value natural capital. Next year we will establish this £10m fund²⁴ which will support the development of natural environment projects which blend public and private investment to protect and improve the natural environment. Those projects may support trees and woodlands, and use different ecosystem service revenue streams to remunerate initial investment. We will also look to increase opportunities for green finance for payments for ecosystem services, building on the work of the Woodland Carbon Guarantee to reward landowners for carbon capture.

Governance

35. The ETPP will be overseen by a dedicated ETPP Board and outcomes and actions will be informed by a dedicated Scientific Advisory Group and research programme.
36. There will be clear links between the ETPP, peat-related work and the Nature Strategy, to ensure that the co-benefits across each of these areas of work are realised. This will be managed through team collaboration across the three areas, as well as coordination through Defra's Domestic Nature Board.

Regulations

37. FC regulate woodland creation and management in England and is responsible for administering the EIA (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999, as amended. This covers afforestation, deforestation, forest roads and quarries and is the principal control for regulating afforestation in England and ensuring UKFS compliance in woodland creation proposals. The EIA (Forestry) Regulations in England have also been used to provide an indicative Low Risk map for woodland creation²⁵ showing where designated landscapes, sites, and features of national interest do not present a constraint to afforestation (although local constraints must still be identified and mitigated for). We are exploring ways to simplify and speed up the EU derived EIA process, thresholds and decision types currently deployed, to reduce uncertainty for proposers and increase

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/green-projects-given-support-to-attract-private-sector-investment>

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/assess-environmental-impact-before-you-create-new-woodland#update-to-low-risk-map>

confidence in meeting the regulatory requirements and their overall confidence to pursue woodland creation.

38. The UKFS²⁶ underpins decision making on whether public funds should be spent on woodland creation projects. The UKFS is reviewed every 5 years to ensure it remains relevant to public policies and delivery practices. The Woodland Creation Planning Grant (WCPG) helps landowners to develop woodland creation plans that meet UKFS requirements and pass the EIA evidence requirements in almost all cases, allowing for greater efficiency in the woodland creation process. Helping landowners to identify key issues which constrain tree planting and woodland creation and directing them to advice and accurate information to inform their proposals is critical to delivering improved rates of tree planting and realising our manifesto commitment. We will soon publish detailed guidance on woodland creation planning to support the sector in gaining consent to plant more efficiently and with more certainty.

Sapling supply

39. To support a sustained planting rate across the UK of 30,000ha per year of new woodland creation from 2025, an indicative additional 30 million tree seedlings will be required annually. The ETPP will work to ensure there is sufficient planting stock to meet demand. This could include projects to increase seed supply, increase production at seed extractors and nurseries managed by the public sector, and grants to increase production and innovation at private nurseries. Although more than 90% of planting stock used in woodland creation projects is produced in the UK, some imported stock is used. In anticipation of continuing to import stock, we are seeking opportunities for additional plant health inspection capacity to identify and mitigate any potential risk of introduction of pests and diseases into the UK. This is further outlined in our response to Q5 (Paragraphs 102-107).

Workforce and skills

40. We also need to stimulate employment and skills across the forestry sector. The Forestry Skills Study of 2017²⁷ outlined skills shortage in the sector, including in tree planting roles. This study and the Forestry Skills Plan²⁸ have been steering the work of a cross-sector Forestry Skills Forum²⁹ to address issues identified,

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-forestry-standard>

²⁷ <https://rfs.org.uk/media/442100/forestry-skills-study-report-for-england-and-wales-2017.pdf>

²⁸ <https://www.confor.org.uk/media/247374/forestry-skills-plan-2019-2024.pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.lantra.co.uk/forestry-skills-forum>

which is being reviewed in light of the new manifesto commitment, potential impacts of exit from the EU, and the Covid-19 pandemic. A new workforce study is currently being scoped by the Forestry Skills Forum. This is due to be completed in 2021 and will outline the state of the current workforce, scope the workforce needed to achieve our commitments, and support constructive discussion with the education sector on current and future provision.

41. The Government also opened a £40m Green Recovery Challenge Fund this summer as part of a wider green economic recovery, jobs and skills package, providing funding for environmental charities and their delivery partners to initiate projects that will help combat climate change and restore nature. The fund will help create and protect jobs across the environment sector including in the implementation of nature-based solutions (such as tree planting) to combat climate change, protecting habitats and connecting people with nature. The fund comprises of £10m from the Nature Recovery Fund and £30m from the Nature for Climate Fund and is being delivered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Defra group³⁰. An additional £40m will be made available in 2021 through a second round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, as announced in 'The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution'³¹.

Mapping and tree planting suitability

42. We also recognise the important role that local authorities have in helping to achieve our planting commitments. The benefits and value that an urban forest can provide for those living and working there is significant, with this value amplified in large cities. For example, trees provide around £133m worth of benefits to Greater London³² and over £33m to Greater Manchester per year³³. We encourage local authorities to increase their canopy cover and recognise and deliver the multiple benefits trees provide for local communities. We have targeted the Urban Tree Challenge Fund to communities that would benefit most from an increase in canopy cover.

43. We also encourage local authorities to create, implement, review and revise local tree and woodland strategies. When produced and efficiently implemented,

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/governments-40-million-green-recovery-challenge-fund-opens-for-applications>

³¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936567/10_POI_NT_PLAN_BOOKLET.pdf

³² https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/valuing_londons_urban_forest_i-tree_report_final.pdf

³³ https://www.cityoftrees.org.uk/sites/default/files/8082_All_our_trees_report_Dr8_MW.pdf

these local strategies demonstrate that the local authorities that produce them value trees as real and valuable assets. Production of these by more local authorities could be used to engage communities and businesses to help drive and achieve both local and national ambitions. We are looking into producing best practice guidance for local authorities that may need assistance in producing their own local tree and woodland strategy.

44. Improvements are also required to the accuracy (spatial accuracy, and how up to date the data is) and relevance of data. Some of the licensed data used to inform land use change proposals is out of date, and this poses a risk to the principle of planting the right tree in the right place. Access to relevant data, such as through FC's Land Information Search (LIS)³⁴ and Defra's MAGIC³⁵ online mapping tools, provides some search and report functionality. FC will be improving its LIS report function to better flag key constraints, sources of advice, and provide a focused report themed on afforestation.

Communications and engagement

45. An effective communication campaign to emphasise the importance of trees and their benefits will help realise our ambitions. Woodland creation communications to date have focused mainly on promoting grant and incentive schemes. We are developing a new communications strategy, considering how we can drive change and encourage tree planting and woodland management by landowners, land managers and investors. This will include increasing our focus on vitally important audiences, including community groups, business, local authorities and farmers. We are developing a robust audience insight analysis to inform this, supported by the ETS consultation summary of responses.

Q3. How effective is the co-ordination between the four nations on forestry issues, including biosecurity, plant health and other cross-border issues?

46. While forestry is devolved, there is strong collaboration between the four nations in recognition of many UK-wide dependencies. This includes sharing knowledge in many areas such as workforce capacity and skills, timber markets, sapling supply; working together to undertake scientific research and collate evidence; sharing collective strategies for biosecurity; and joint commitment to standards for sustainable forest management.

Cross-dependencies

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/use-the-land-information-search#land-information-search>

³⁵ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

47. There are cross-UK dependencies relating to tree planting and their management. There is an existing framework to manage this relationship across the UK, including a policy sharing forum, a joint agreement on evidence priorities, and joint standards ensures high standards of silviculture, biodiversity and biosecurity in all woodlands across the UK.
48. The UK-wide manifesto commitment can only be realised through collaboration with our colleagues in the devolved administrations. Ambitions to increase planting are high across the UK. This is evident in Scotland's new target to plant 18,000 ha per year by the end of this Parliament³⁶; Wales' ambition to increase to 4,000 ha per year³⁷, and; Northern Ireland's Forests for the Future Programme which aims to plant 9,000 ha over the next ten years³⁸. We have not yet set a target for England, but as noted in our response to Q1 above (Paragraph 16), we are exploring whether a statutory target for trees in England would be appropriate.
49. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) came into use in April 2019 between Defra and the devolved administrations to ensure strategic functions are delivered in partnership where we have shared strategic interests and UK-wide functions³⁹. The MoU sets out that:
- Scotland will have responsibility for the UKFS, the Woodland Carbon Code and forestry economics advice;
 - Wales will co-ordinate the commissioning, co-ordination and programme management of forestry research;
 - England/UK will have responsibility for co-ordinating international forestry policy support and certain plant health and biosecurity functions;
 - Forest Research will remain as an executive agency of FC.

Standards

50. The UKFS is the reference standard for sustainable forest management across the UK and applies to all woodlands regardless of who owns or manages them. The UKFS is based on an internationally agreed set of criteria and indicators that help ensure forestry provides economic, environment and social benefits for

³⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland-governments-programme-scotland-2020-2021/>

³⁷ https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/low-carbon-delivery-plan_1.pdf

³⁸ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/daera-forestry-grants>

³⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/forestry-devolution-resource-list/#arrangements>

the public. It is reviewed every 5 years to ensure it remains underpinned by the most up to date research and evidence base and continues to meet the needs of government, industry and other stakeholders. The review process is facilitated effectively by Scottish Forestry and governed by an efficient UK-wide steering group with representatives from each of the four nations. The detail of the standard is refined by subject matter experts from each nation and from Forest Research.

Woodland Carbon Code

51. The UK Government and the devolved administrations work closely together on maintaining and developing the Woodland Carbon Code⁴⁰, forming its Executive Board and sitting on its Advisory Board, with Scottish Forestry holding responsibility for its administration. Decisions are taken jointly, recognising the different characteristics of trees, woodland creation and forestry in the four nations. The Code continues to underpin woodland creation incentives, for example the Woodland Carbon Guarantee⁴¹ in England. Scottish Forestry continues to provide economic advice for the development of delivery policy for forestry and also played an important role in the development of the Guarantee.

Science and research

52. The MoU acknowledges the need for a shared Great Britain research strategy on trees and forestry to agree the common needs of England, Scotland and Wales, and to underpin the commissioning and monitoring of appropriate research. To action this, in October the Welsh Government published a revised Science and Innovation Strategy for Forestry in Great Britain⁴². This will ensure the interests of each nation are fully represented and appropriate research is supported, whilst providing the framework for forestry related research commissioned by a partnership of Defra, FC, the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Government.

53. The aim of the new Science and Innovation Strategy is to support the highest standards of sustainable forest management, tree planting and woodland creation. It sets out shared priorities which include research on the following themes:

⁴⁰ <https://www.woodlandcarboncode.org.uk/>

⁴¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/woodland-carbon-guarantee>

⁴² <https://gov.wales/gb-wide-science-and-innovation-strategy-forestry-published>

- Sustainable forest management in light of environmental change
- Markets for forest products and services
- Societal benefits from trees, woods and forests
- Resource assessment and sector monitoring
- Achieving multiple ecosystem benefits
- Woodland creation and expansion
- Tree health and biosecurity

54. The Research Strategy Reference Group oversaw the revision of the Science and Innovation Strategy, with Forest Research contributing to meetings by helping to create a timeline for the revision of this Strategy, undertaking a stocktake of each core research programme, proposing activities for short term and long term research priorities and participating in stakeholder engagement events organised by the devolved administrations⁴³.

55. A further example of UK-wide science and research collaboration includes FC led woodland surveys and compiled forest inventories. The rolling 5-year programme of the National Forest Inventory⁴⁴ assesses the size, distribution, composition, and condition of our woodlands through time across Great Britain. In early 2020 a specific strand of this work led to an approved shared approach to analyse and agree the ecological condition status of all woodland in Great Britain. Working with statutory agencies across Great Britain, Forest Research has developed a statistical assessment⁴⁵ to measure woodland ecological and woodland habitat condition. This has enabled native, near native and non-native woodland stands (outside of protected sites) to be classified as favourable, intermediate, or unfavourable in terms of their ecological condition for the first time.

Plant health

56. Biosecurity of our tree stock is crucial, and encouraging increased availability of UK grown planting material through cooperation helps to secure that. We want more planting material to be sown and grown in the UK and the Government supports the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme⁴⁶ that launched in February 2020.

⁴³ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/about-us/annual-reports-and-corporate-plans/key-actions-2019-2020/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/national-forest-inventory/about-the-nfi/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/national-forest-inventory/what-our-woodlands-and-tree-cover-outside-woodlands-are-like-today-8211-nfi-inventory-reports-and-woodland-map-reports/nfi-woodland-ecological-condition/>

⁴⁶ <https://planthealthy.org.uk/>

57. Plant health policy is devolved but the four nations work collaboratively to build consistent approaches to biosecurity. A refreshed Great Britain Plant Health Biosecurity Strategy is due for publication in 2021. Following devolution, FC now deliver plant health functions for England, Scotland and Wales, including import and export controls on wood and wood products, inland statutory surveillance and forest reproductive material. Defra provides the secretariat for several UK level governing bodies, including:

- The UK National Plant Protection Organisation Group, which provides strategic oversight and decision making to the UK Plant Health Service and is chaired by the UK's Chief Plant Health Officer. It is attended by senior officials from the UK Government and the devolved administrations.
- The UK Plant Health Risk Group, which meets monthly to review plant biosecurity risks to the UK and to consider shared issues. The UK Plant Health Risk Register⁴⁷ contains the details of over 1000 plant pests and pathogens, 300 of which can impact trees. Members of this group include inspectors and policy and technical officials from across the four nations and FC. We have reviewed and strengthened the Plant Health Risk Group following the UK's exit from the EU, including setting up additional working groups which provide technical advice to the main Group.
- In addition, the Defra Chief Plant Health Officer has established and chairs two new UK level preparedness boards, on Xylella and Emerald Ash Borer, to ensure the UK is ready to respond swiftly to an incursion of either of these major threats.

58. The UK has been at the forefront of science in a number of areas of plant health for many years. Expertise in Defra, the devolved administrations and government agencies, including Forest Research, is supplemented by extensive research carried out in domestic laboratories, including universities and Fera Science Ltd.

59. Close cooperation will remain essential to maintain UK biosecurity after the end of the transition period for the UK leaving the EU. Officials are working closely with the devolved administrations to design future common frameworks where necessary, in line with the principles on common frameworks agreed with the Scottish and Welsh Governments in October 2017 and the 'Intergovernmental Agreement on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and the Establishment of

⁴⁷ <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/phiw/riskRegister/>

Common Frameworks', agreed between the UK and Welsh Governments in April 2018⁴⁸.

Ongoing collaboration

60. In addition to these formal arrangements there are strong links between forestry officials in the four nations, with exchange of information and joint actions taken in a number of areas including improving the skills, safety and capacity of the forestry workforce, timber supply chains, forest management contractors and UK-wide plant supply chains. We are, and will continue to, work closely with colleagues in the devolved administrations to scope and provide solutions for common and shared challenges.
61. For example, we worked with the devolved administrations to ensure the forestry sector could adapt and survive the initial impacts of Covid-19, ensuring continued supply of key goods such as wooden pallets, upon which national supply chains rely. Additionally, since July this year and for the first time, tree nurseries in England and Wales are now able to apply for funding from Scottish Forestry's Harvesting and Processing Grant, with c. £2m made available (£1m from Defra, £1m from the Scottish Government and £50,000 from the Welsh Government). This will help these small but crucial businesses to confidently invest and increase sapling supply by obtaining the equipment and resources they need to increase the capacity and success of their sapling stock. It will also allow nurseries to adapt workplaces to Covid-19, thereby making it safe for employees.

Q4. Why were previous ambitions for increasing tree planting in England not met and what lessons should be learned?

62. Previous tree planting commitments have provided experience and lessons to inform our current policy. Through the ETS consultation we have identified barriers to tree planting and woodland creation, working with stakeholders and seeking the views of the public. Through the Strategy we will set out how policy and funding mechanisms can be improved, enabling us to deliver substantial increases in tree planting and woodland creation in this Parliament and beyond.

Previous ambitions

63. The 2017 manifesto committed to plant 11 million trees by 2022. Whilst this commitment has been superseded by the new manifesto commitment to increase tree planting to 30,000 ha of trees per year across the UK by 2025, we

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intergovernmental-agreement-on-the-european-union-withdrawal-bill>

were on track to meet the 2017 commitment. We planted approximately 6.92m trees April 2017- March 2020 (2.3m per year). We therefore need to plant 4.08m trees by 2022 (2.04m per year) to meet the 2017 commitment⁴⁹, and are on track to achieve this if the current planting rate is maintained. The previous commitment provided an opportunity to identify, learn and understand many of the barriers to tree planting and woodland creation. Through the ETS consultation we learned more about these, and through the Strategy itself we will set out our plans for addressing these barriers.

Current woodland creation offers

64. The current Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme helps fund the delivery of woodland creation and wider natural capital benefits, such as biodiversity and natural flood management. Those wishing to plant new woodlands have indicated that they feel the processes surrounding grant application and gaining regulatory consent to plant are overly complex and burdensome. Government acknowledges the difficulties that have been identified in the past in applying for the woodland creation grants through this scheme.
65. Defra, FC, Rural Payments Agency and Natural England continue to work together to ensure these issues are identified, resolved and learned from as we begin to transition away from CS and CAP, and towards the national rollout of the Environmental Land Management scheme in 2024⁵⁰. We have made improvements to the woodland creation grant through the CS, including reduced processing times, simplified criteria scoring, support for additional capital items, and delivering additional training to staff and applicants. Furthermore, in September 2018 we also removed the application window for this grant so applications can be made at any time. FC continues to work closely with stakeholders to improve guidance, mapping information, and support to landowners, as well as increasing engagement and joint working with Natural England to support joint agri-environment and forestry applications.
66. The WCPG and Woodland Carbon Fund (WCF) were introduced to encourage the planting of larger scale woodlands to help accelerate planting rates. However, the sector indicated that these grants presented a barrier to applications coming forward. As a result, in 2017 we piloted changes to these grants, including reducing the threshold for applications from 30ha to 10ha to allow for a greater variety of applications. Under the WCF, a further payment

⁴⁹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/891767/Government-Supported-New-Planting-Trees-England-2019-20_.pdf

⁵⁰ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/41/pdfs/uksem_20200041_en.pdf

was added to support maintenance of young trees. We also announced in late 2018 that the WCF would now be open to applications from public bodies as well. These changes have been welcomed and we are seeing greater uptake, so we have made the changes permanent. We continue to actively engage with the sector to promote uptake of all our schemes.

67. We also amended the WCPG ahead of its relaunch in November this year⁵¹. This includes: reducing the minimum eligibility size from 10ha to 5ha; providing advice for smaller schemes; removing the requirements for 70% productive species in favour of basic UKFS compliance, supporting the planning of a broader range of woodlands. These amendments were developed following surveys, a focus group with staff that deliver the grant and a discussion with the FC's Applicants' Focus Group.

Overcoming barriers with future funding and policy

68. We will build on these improvements and learn from previous experience as we design the deployment of future funding mechanisms. Defra and FC will continue to engage with applicants, delivery partners and other stakeholders to ensure that our grant schemes and practices are fit-for-purpose, identifying areas of improvement and implementing respective solutions where appropriate.
69. We are also exploring opportunities to drive the development of innovative green finance and market models. In the long term, we have learnt we cannot solely rely on grant mechanisms to deliver the tree planting rates needed to contribute to net zero commitments. Future funding will ensure that the carbon sequestration outcomes and wider nature recovery benefits are delivered at the required pace, but will also crucially support a portfolio of innovative delivery mechanisms and the development of future markets and financing options, enabling sustainable long-term investment in these outcomes and benefits. The Nature for Climate Fund provides an opportunity to develop mechanisms to efficiently blend public and private investment in tree planting and the natural capital benefits they secure, whilst simultaneously allowing the forestry sector to build strong and resilient relationships with the private sector. This applies at national, regional and local levels.
70. A range of financial issues have acted as barriers to a rapid acceleration in rates of planting. The economic cycle of forestry of high up-front costs with no income from products for the first 20 years could be seen as incompatible with traditional agricultural business models. Woodland creation also generally results in a

⁵¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ealert-2-november-2020-improved-woodland-creation-planning-grant-launched-today/ealert-2-november-2020-improved-woodland-creation-planning-grant-launched-today>

reduction in land prices, although evidence suggests that this is countered in the longer-term. Longer-term income forgone payments that were available through the Farm Woodland Scheme and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme coincided with high planting rates between 1995 and 2005. Learning from this, we launched the Woodland Carbon Guarantee. This is designed to bring forward woodland creation applications through the guarantee of future income.

71. We consulted on the ETS between June and September 2020. Through this, we sought views on what barriers landowners and managers face in establishing trees and woodlands, and how Government can help overcome these to increase tree planting, woodland creation and the delivery of wider ecosystem benefits. Many of the questions asked in the consultation focussed on identifying and overcoming these barriers, whether financial or non-financial⁵². Analysis of responses will inform our strategy to remove and reduce barriers where appropriate, and learn from what has not worked in the past.
72. We are aware of some landowners and land managers expressing reservations about committing to land use change through new woodland creation now, and their concerns regarding uncertainty in the forestry sector. Minister Goldsmith has provided reassurance that landowners proceeding with woodland creation now will not be disadvantaged in the future⁵³. However, we understand that this will not abate all concerns by stakeholders. We continue to refine and improve the Environmental Land Management scheme, as outlined in our response to Q2 (Paragraph 33).
73. We continue to identify and analyse the blockers to increasing tree planting rates. As part of this process, we brought together expertise from across Defra, FC and Natural England to explore the end-to-end journey for customers and other actors undertaking tree projects. This has been crucial in informing how we efficiently design the deployment of current and future funding, to ensure that we are learning from best practice to address existing and potential blockers, whilst innovating to bring about the step-change required to meet tree planting commitments.

Planting on public land

74. Previous woodland expansion aspirations have focused on encouraging private landowners to plant on their own land, in part as a result of constraints placed by the EU Rural Development Regulation. Public land represents a significant

⁵² https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/england-tree-strategy/supporting_documents/englandtreestrategyconsultationdocument%20%20correctedv1.pdf

⁵³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reassurance-to-land-managers-to-plant-trees-now>

opportunity and we will work with other departments and agencies to explore opportunities through the ETPP.

75. For ambitious planting commitments to be met, action is required from across the spectrum of land managers; private, public and not-for-profit. In the past decade, direct planting by FC has been low with little direct funding. We are exploring ways to stimulate planting through expansion of the Nation's Forests, which could include leasehold acquisitions. Forestry England is in a unique position to use its accumulated expertise to deliver both its own programme of woodland creation projects, but also to work with partners to help stimulate woodland creation in the landscapes surrounding the Nation's Forest. This could help stimulate interest in woodland creation from a section of the land managing community who, previously, may not have considered taking forward woodland creation on their land themselves for a variety of reasons. We are also exploring ways we can increase tree planting on other areas of the Government estate, including land owned by other departments.

Utilising other opportunities

76. We must also continue to learn and develop relationships with key stakeholders in the protected landscapes sector. Trees and woodlands cover a significant land area within National Parks, with one third of Forestry England land lying within National Parks. National Park Authorities and FC signed an accord in July 2018⁵⁴, a statement of their shared ambition, to bring together decision makers to ensure woodland is managed sustainably and in line with a natural capital approach. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) pledged in the 2019 Colchester Declaration⁵⁵ that 'at least 36,000 ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in AONBs following the principle of the right tree in the right place' by 2030 and to ensure that 'all AONB management plans include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero'. Defra and FC have engaged with National Park Authorities and AONBs to ensure the ETS will include ambitions for woodland creation in protected landscapes. These ambitions will be developed in parallel with the creation of new National Parks and AONBs, as set out in 'The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution'⁵⁶

⁵⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accord-between-forestry-commission-england-and-national-parks-england#:~:text=The%20Accord%2C%20a%20statement%20of,with%20a%20natural%20capital%20approach.>

⁵⁵ https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/application/files/7815/6326/2583/The_Colchester_Declaration.pdf

⁵⁶

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936567/10_POI_NT_PLAN_BOOKLET.pdf

77. Those wishing to plant larger scale woodlands in England tend to target inexpensive land, particularly given that land prices in England tend to be higher than in Scotland. However, this land tends to be more environmentally constrained, through landscape, priority habitat, deep peat and the presence of priority species. It is vital that we efficiently balance the competing needs for land, as outlined in our response to Q1 above (Paragraphs 22-24). It is therefore necessary that the ETS aligns well with the upcoming Peat Strategy and Nature Strategy, as well as existing policies such as the Tree Health Resilience Strategy and the 25 YEP.

78. We are also investing £5m to develop a Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment⁵⁷. This will assess the condition of our natural capital assets, ecosystem services and their value, so we can ensure that the value of our natural capital is taken into account in Government, local government and private sector decision making. It will also increase our understanding of and ability to inform land use and land use choices, allowing us to better target our policy interventions to ensure that the best value for money is achieved when making trade-off decisions.

Q5. In relation to increasing tree planting in England, what should the Government be trying to achieve? For example, how should the following policy objectives be prioritised?

79. The right approach to increasing tree planting and woodland creation will deliver benefits against a range of different objectives. The Government is committed to maximising the range of outcomes that tree planting can achieve, including: mitigating and adapting to climate change; restoring biodiversity and nature; providing natural flood management; securing a resilient and biosecure tree stock; delivering social and wellbeing benefits for people and; providing a source of green economic value. Public interest in tree planting is a testament to the wide range of benefits they can provide.

Tree planting objectives

80. Tree planting has the potential to address the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. When grown, selected, planted and managed appropriately trees can provide multiple benefits for climate, nature, people and the economy, supporting the green recovery. These objectives are not mutually exclusive, with tree planting and woodland creation schemes of different types contributing to multiple objectives. For example, biodiversity and nature recovery

⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/george-eustice-speech-on-environmental-recovery-20-july-2020>

are dependent on other priorities such as climate change mitigation and adaption and biosecurity⁵⁸.

81. Trees provide multiple natural capital benefits. However, on a regional and local scale the prioritisation of policy objectives for tree planting is likely to be different and nuanced depending on the location and delivery plan of each site. For example, Forestry England's management of the Nation's Forests illustrates how multi-purpose forestry can deliver a range of policy priorities. The Nation's Forests are not only comprised of woodland, but a mosaic of wooded and open habitats, which include focused areas delivering for wildlife, natural flood management, people and recreation, and timber production.
82. We must support landowners in planting the right tree in the right place. One tool to help us achieve this is spatial prioritisation, maximising benefits and ensuring value for money at the same time. One option would be to align with LNRs, which is outlined in our response to Q1 (Paragraph 24). Such tools will provide spatial frameworks to underpin the development of the Nature Recovery Network and, through the consideration of wider environmental goals, support environmental policies such as tree planting by identifying opportunities where this benefits nature. Exercises such as this will help tree planting to be undertaken in the right places to maximise associated benefits.
83. Spatial prioritisation is important for other areas of environmental policy as well, notably Environmental Land Management, where spatial prioritisation will inform land managers about environmental priorities in their area. For example, if one of the desired outcomes is flood mitigation, we can use spatial prioritisation to determine where the optimum locations for tree planting for natural flood mitigation are. We are assessing a range of approaches to spatial prioritisation for Environmental Land Management and exploring how best to incorporate local priorities. We are also currently undertaking Environmental Land Management tests and trials to understand different approaches to agreeing spatial priorities locally and target optimum outcomes⁵⁹.
84. There are multiple policy objectives the Government will achieve through its tree planting ambitions:

⁵⁸ <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-briefs/invasive-alien-species-and-climate-change>

⁵⁹

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/elm/elmpolicyconsultation/supporting_documents/ELM%20Policy%20Discussion%20Document%20230620.pdf

Mitigating or adapting to climate change

Climate mitigation

85. The CCC advise⁶⁰ that the UK should increase planting rates to between 30,000 and 50,000ha per year and maintain this to 2050 to reach net zero, equating to an increase of UK forestry cover from 13% to 17% by 2050. Reaching this planting rate by 2025 is ambitious but one we are committed to achieving as a key contribution towards achieving net zero.

86. Nature-based solutions, including trees, have the potential to cost-effectively provide over one third of climate mitigation required between now and 2030 to stabilise warming to below 2°C, achieving nature's mitigation potential of 10-12 Gt of CO₂ per year⁶¹. Nature-based solutions can also play a key role domestically, alongside ambitious decarbonisation action and mitigation in other sectors. Tree planting is a key contributor to the sequestration potential of nature-based solutions, as outlined in 'The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution'⁶². The UK's tree stock currently sequesters the equivalent of 18 Mt CO₂ per annum, approximately 4% of the UK's gross emissions. Increasing the carbon stored in our trees will be integral to achieving net zero.

87. The forestry sector, through the provision of timber from productive forests also contributes to emissions abatement through carbon being stored in harvested wood products – particularly long lived products such as those used in the construction sector – and through those products substituting for materials such as concrete, steel and aluminium which have high energy emissions associated with their production⁶³. Home-grown timber is vital for society to move towards more sustainable wood-based products, to help support a future low-carbon economy. This was recognised in the 25 YEP and we are committed to increasing the safe and sustainable use of timber in construction – driving more investment in new trees, and locking away the carbon of existing ones.

88. Domestic biomass supply in combination with bioenergy with carbon capture and storage technology, including from existing forests and new short rotation

⁶⁰ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/land-use-policies-for-a-net-zero-uk/>

⁶¹ <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/take-action/events/climate-action-summit-2019/nature-based-solutions#:~:text=Nature%2DBased%20Solutions%20to%20Address%20Climate%20Change,-The%20Nature%20Based&text=Authoritative%20research%20indicates%20that%20Nature,gigatons%20of%20CO2%20per%20year>

⁶²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936567/10_POI_NT_PLAN_BOOKLET.pdf

⁶³ http://www.tsoshop.co.uk/gempdf/Climate_Change_Main_Report.pdf

forestry, may also have an important role to play in meeting net zero commitments⁶⁴.

Climate adaptation and resilience

89. Tree planting also provides essential adaptation and resilience benefits. This includes shading and cooling, natural flood risk management through rainfall interception and percolation, and connectivity for fragmented habitats⁶⁵. Planting and establishing urban trees will provide significant climate adaptation benefits, including shading and creating an urban ecosystem. The Government launched the Urban Tree Challenge Fund⁶⁶ to help achieve such objectives, and the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain through the Environment Bill will also integrate trees within developments and urban areas.

90. We must also ensure that trees planted today are appropriate and resilient for the climate of the future. They must be able to become successfully established and withstand future weather conditions. We continue to explore a range of approaches to diversify our national tree stock and our woodlands in a biosecure manner. This includes sourcing disease-free seed to grow in England. By sourcing seed from trees in countries which currently have climates that we expect the UK to have in future, we can build climate resilience into our tree and woodland stock for the future climate. We must also consider potential pests and diseases that may flourish in the UK in future climates, as outlined in the Tree Health Strategy 2018⁶⁷. This, combined with further policy, strategic and funding levers, will also help us to achieve the tree and woodlands related goals of the second National Adaptation Programme report published in 2018:

- Woodland resource is expanded and better linked to enhance its resilience at stand and landscape level;
- Existing woodlands are more resilient to the impacts of climate change and pests and diseases;
- Adaptation is embedded within future forestry policy (post-CAP) to contribute to long term reductions of climate change risks, and;

⁶⁴ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/urban-regeneration-and-greenspace-partnership/greenspace-in-practice/practical-considerations-and-challenges-to-greenspace/climate-change-practical-considerations/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund>

⁶⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/710719/tree-health-resilience-strategy.pdf

- Woodlands are more resilient to natural hazards.

91. To further contribute to a climate resilient tree stock for the future, we have produced practical advice to landowners on ways to better manage their woodland to combat the effects of climate change. The manual on ‘Managing England’s woodlands in a climate emergency’⁶⁸ lays out practical guidance on how we should be planning and planting appropriately for the current and future climate. The climate matching tool⁶⁹ can also help landowners to consider the selection of seed from trees that are growing successfully in an environment that England’s may look like in the future. This tool incorporates UK Climate Projections 2018⁷⁰ to visualise the extent of changes to the climate that future woodlands will have to accommodate.

92. The climate matching tool should be used in parallel with the Ecological Site Classification tree selection tool, which shows how trees will perform in a future climate⁷¹. The Ecological Site Classification tool, developed by Forest Research, provides an objective system for tree species selection, taking into account site climate and soil conditions, as well as future climate change projections. This allows users to incorporate future suitability into decision making, ensuring suitable and resilient woodlands are created. Other examples of where science and evidence are directly informing policy making and forestry practice include the ‘Slowing the Flow’ project ⁷², which improved understanding and confidence in the role of natural flood management in managing flood risk, and helps to underpin regional and national initiatives aligned with the Woodlands for Water project.

93. We will continue to promote the use of such tools to landowners and land managers to ensure we have a resilient national tree stock. Robust science and evidence are necessary to underpin sound policy and to directly enable landowners and managers to deliver best practice projects.

Promoting biodiversity and nature recovery

Nature Recovery Network

⁶⁸

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/872285/Climate_Change_Full_Guide.pdf

⁶⁹ <https://climatematch.org.uk/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/approach/collaboration/ukcp/index>

⁷¹ <http://www.forestdss.org.uk/geoforestdss/>

⁷² <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/slowng-the-flow-at-pickering/>

94. At the core of the Nature Recovery Network will be our existing best areas for nature, including protected sites and National Nature Reserves. As set out in the 25 YEP we will also create or restore 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife-rich habitat beyond these existing areas. In the Spring 2020 budget, the government announced a Nature Recovery Fund, which will bring together businesses, landowners and local communities to protect and restore habitats, species and landscapes so nature can thrive everywhere.

95. The government is exploring how the Nature for Climate Fund can support existing and new woodland creation partnerships, to accelerate progress with woodland creation and the development of the Nature Recovery Network. Trees and woodlands provide a key habitat for nature to thrive and are therefore vital for nature and conservation. Some woodlands are priority habitats, while others have a role in buffering and connecting habitats, providing essential corridors, food and sanctuary for a range of species. Expanding, restoring and connecting woodlands will make a significant contribution to the Nature Recovery Network.

Trees and woodlands as a valuable habitat

96. Other tree and woodland habitats connect fragmented habitats and provide food supply and space for a variety of species including invertebrates, lichens and fungi. England's woodlands provide habitat for rare and declining species and support for at least 250 of England's 942 priority species. Recovery of threatened and iconic animal and plant species will need a greater number and diversity of habitats, and wildlife corridors to help them move in response to climate change. The ETPP will help to achieve this through the planting of trees.

97. In September 2020, the Prime Minister committed to protecting 30% of UK land by 2030⁷³ (i.e. 30x30). To meet this target in England, we want to find an approach that drives up the biodiversity value of our existing protected areas – protected sites and landscapes - as well as extending them or identifying other effective area-based conservation measures. Through policy and the tree planting programme, we will look into how we can support this 30x30 goal. This will build upon work we are already doing to enhance site conditions and create and extend habitats through increased tree planting and woodland creation.

98. The scale of our tree planting commitments means we must encourage woodland creation of all sizes and types – delivering a range of benefits. For example, we can improve water quality and natural flood management by creating riparian woodlands, extend and connect habitats through natural regeneration of native woodlands and improve farm productivity and soil quality

⁷³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-commits-to-protect-30-of-uk-land-in-boost-for-biodiversity>

through agro-forestry. All of these will deliver biodiversity value and create important habitats within and outside existing protected areas, which could help to contribute towards the delivery of the Nature Recovery Network. We continue to explore ways we can better protect some of our most valuable habitats.

Natural Colonisation

99. Natural colonisation in the right environment can be a cost-effective mechanism for the establishment of woodlands. It encourages the natural establishment of local provenance trees, as well as a structurally diverse habitat, proving better adaption to local environmental conditions and supporting a wider range of wildlife. It also reduces the risk of importation of tree disease, reduces plastic tree guard use and is of low cost. Natural colonisation needs to be targeted at those sites where it is likely to have the greatest chance of success and where it can deliver the outcomes specifically desired for woodland establishment.
100. Examples of locations where it may be a particularly desirable technique are to buffer and link existing and ancient woodland patches, to expand out from established hedgerows to create woodland corridors, and in encouraging development of riparian, gill and wet woodlands and wooded limestone pavement. We are currently considering ways in which natural colonisation can be implemented successfully, and where this mechanism would work best.

Trees outside woodlands

101. Trees outside woodlands have a high biodiversity value, yet are being lost from the landscape faster than they are being replaced. Individual trees and hedgerows can make an important contribution to connectivity and ecological functioning of landscape and could play an important role in delivery nature recovery. We will consider ways to retain and expand these resources, ensuring they are climate, pests and disease resilient, and ensure they are not damaged by nearby land management.

Increasing biosecurity and plant health

UK-wide biosecurity strategy and standards

102. Biodiversity and nature recovery are dependent on good biosecurity and climate change adaptation. Globalisation in trade and travel means pest and disease threats to plant health in the UK are increasing. Biosecurity is central to protecting significant investment in tree planting and protecting the tree-scape as a natural capital asset long term. The ETS will reconfirm the priorities of Defra's 2018 Tree Health Resilience Strategy⁷⁴, including environmental goals for resilience – diversity, connectivity, condition and extent.

103. We aim to reduce the biosecurity risks associated with imported planting material by supporting domestic production through expansion of and investment in nursery facilities, as has recently been done in partnership with the Welsh and Scottish Governments (Paragraph 61). We will also look to provide nursery suppliers with foresight on potential future biosecurity measures to allow for the sourcing of appropriate planting stock. To ensure a tree-scape that is resilient to climate change and future pests and diseases, we need to facilitate a supply chain of planting material from a diverse range of species, from a range of provenances, and which have wide genetic diversity.
104. The UK continues to drive higher international biosecurity standards and increase inspectorate resources at the border and inland. The UK's risk-based biosecurity regime prohibits or controls the import of high-risk plants and planting material. The prohibited list includes species such as larch, spruce and pine from outside Europe, while the controlled group includes commodities which must meet prescribed requirements (e.g. treatments, inspections) to be imported from a third country (with an official phytosanitary certificate) or be accompanied by a plant passport if moved from the EU. A statutory notification scheme is in place requiring pre-notification for certain species imported from the EU, which provides additional intelligence and enables targeted checks. These arrangements will be built on through the introduction of post transition period regulations focused specifically on risks to Great Britain biosecurity, including new requirements for imports from the EU which will bring them into line with those applying for imports from non-EU countries, including the need for a phytosanitary certificate and pre-notification.

Nursery sector biosecurity

105. The UK's nurseries currently produce over 100m trees each year for forestry. The UK demand in recent years has been frequently greater than supply but the nursery sector has also lacked the certainty of demand to significantly invest in increasing capacity to meet tree planting ambitions. Following our commitment to increase tree planting rates across the UK, we are working with the nursery sector to instil the confidence required to boost capacity.
106. Planting stock needs to be biosecure and from a known provenance. That is why we want more planting material to be sown and grown in the UK and support the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme launched in February 2020 and the underpinning Plant Health Management Standard⁷⁵.

⁷⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/710719/tree-health-resilience-strategy.pdf

⁷⁵ <https://planthealthy.org.uk/resources/plant-health-management-standard-1>

107. We are also exploring ways to build biosecurity into the sector that goes beyond nurseries. This includes: potentially providing updated and better guidance on biosecurity; amending planning policy to encourage local planning authorities to source trees from suppliers that meet the requirements of the Plant Health Management Standard; managing invasive non-native species through management, monitoring and education, and; introducing conditions to Government contracts and grants requiring that trees are sourced from suppliers that meet the Plant Health Management Standard.

Improving human well-being and health

108. Improving health and wellbeing through nature is a key Government objective. The 25 YEP sets out how spending time in the natural environment can improve our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases⁷⁶. Trees and woodlands offer communities valuable landscapes in which they can enjoy the mental and physical health benefits the natural environment can provide. The preservation of and increase in trees and woodland will create high quality green spaces for people to visit, providing positive health benefits.

Planting in urban areas

109. In the 25 YEP we committed to the provision of greater quantity and quality of green infrastructure, which includes woodlands and trees in both rural and urban settings. The Government has already undertaken work to action this. For example, the £10m Urban Tree Challenge Fund⁷⁷ opened in 2019 and awards funding for projects which offer the greatest social and environmental benefits for an area, including areas which are particularly deprived and have low tree canopy cover.

110. The Government will continue to explore ways to plant trees and create woodlands in areas where it will have the greatest positive impact for people's health and wellbeing. For example, we are working closely with charity partners to expand the Northern Forest and deliver social, urban and economic regeneration for millions of people across England. We are also working with other government departments to ensure trees are incorporated more in areas closest to people. For example, we are working with the Department for Transport to update the Manual for Streets,⁷⁸ which will provide updated

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<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=19511>

⁷⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund>

guidance on street design. We are in discussion on how the revised Manual can highlight the importance of the design and integration of trees into streets and urban spaces. The Manual will also provide a signpost to relevant guidance on design and delivery of street trees, helping us to achieve our manifesto commitment for all new streets to be tree-lined.

111. We are also working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on the creation of the National Model Design Code⁷⁹ to provide further clarity on the characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide⁸⁰. The Code will set out what successful urban design looks like, setting a baseline standard for England for quality and best practice, as well as taking into consideration the recommendations of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission⁸¹. Local planning authorities will be expected to take the Code into consideration when developing local guidance and design codes, and when determining the outcome of planning applications. We will also continue to engage and contribute to any revision of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to set clear expectations for new developments⁸². The revision of these documents will help integrate trees into areas of high density of people, providing green infrastructure for local communities.

Community engagement

112. The Government committed in the 25 YEP to encourage children to be close to nature and to help people improve their health and wellbeing through using green spaces. Whilst not strictly in relation to increasing tree planting in England, we have put programmes in place to help achieve this, including a project to increase the outreach of Community Forests with schools. The forestry sector offers many opportunities for people to benefit from trees and woodlands. For example, Forest School is an idea which has developed over time, delivering benefits for young people and engaging them with nature, helping to meet our

⁷⁸ <https://www.ciht.org.uk/knowledge-resource-centre/resources/revising-manual-for-streets/>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843468/National_Design_Guide.pdf

⁸⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

⁸¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/861832/Living_with_beauty_BBBBC_report.pdf

⁸²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf

objectives in the 25 YEP⁸³. We believe the forestry sector could achieve more through closer engagement with the education and health sectors, developing its skills and expertise to support health programmes for green prescribing.

113. Furthermore, as part of the joint Department for Education, Defra and Natural England Children and Nature programme, we are delivering the Community Forest and Woodland Outreach Project⁸⁴. This aims to increase and sustain community forest and woodland outreach activities being delivered to school children, particularly those in disadvantaged areas, to benefit their mental health and wellbeing, and engagement with school. Programmes such as this offer places for children and others to learn, develop and grow in confidence and esteem, providing a strong connection with nature and also opportunities to learn about the ecology and management of the trees, woods and forests around them.

114. We have also recently launched a £4.27m scheme, funded by the Shared Outcomes Fund, to deliver a joint project with Department of Health and Social Care, Natural England, NHS England, Public Health England, and MHCLG which aims to scale up green social prescribing and boost health and well-being by increasing individuals' access to and uptake of nature-based activities⁸⁵.

115. Through the ETS consultation, we also sought views on how to support the Woodland Social Enterprises⁸⁶ in and around our towns and cities, as an alternative model to commercial forestry business. These have evolved from community interest in taking on management responsibilities within their local woodlands, and deliver forestry activities, as well as social interventions. Profit generated from activities are then reinvested back into woodlands for social and environmental purposes.

Protecting natural and cultural heritage

Standards and guidance

116. Our trees and woodlands are crucial to our cultural and natural heritage and history. This can include trees and woodlands of particularly importance to individuals and communities, including irreplaceable habitats such as ancient

⁸³ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/forest-schools-impact-on-young-children-in-england-and-wales/>

⁸⁴ <https://leafuk.org/leafed-newsletter-content/community-forest-and-woodland-outreach-projects#:~:text=Natural%20England%20has%20awarded%20five,disadvantage%20to%20benefit%20from%20nature.>

⁸⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/green-social-prescribing-pilots-open-for-applications>

⁸⁶ <https://www.makinglocalwoodwork.org/woodland-social-enterprise-network>

woodland and ancient and veteran trees, to street trees, parkland and productive forests. We also need to make sure that tree planting does not impact on pre-historic and historic landscape features and artefacts. Given the scale of our tree planting ambitions, it is important the historic environment is considered at the earliest stage possible in the planning of a woodland creation project. It is important to recognise the historic environment and the opportunities it offers. Together, the historic environment and trees can contribute towards public goods⁸⁷, such as carbon credits, natural capital accounting, life-long learning⁸⁸ and access⁸⁹. It is also important to acknowledge it is very rare for the historic environment to stop well-researched and well-designed woodland creation proposals.

117. The UKFS outlines the expectation that any woodland creation project should ensure that historic landscape features and artefacts are appropriately conserved⁹⁰. We will also develop UKFS Practice Guidance that will aid decision-making to determine when afforested peat should be restored to bog, thereby protecting natural heritage peatland and minimising damage to peaty soils from tree planting. We should also consider the potential impacts of short rotation coppice, which is generally not an appropriate planting method on archaeological sites because of fast root growth and potentially damaging harvesting methods.

Legislation and regulation

118. Through the Environment Bill, the Government will be introducing conservation covenants. These will be voluntary private agreements which become legally binding once agreed. They are made between a landowner and responsible body, such as an appropriate public body or conservation charity. They will be designed to conserve the natural or heritage features of the landscape for the benefit of the public, including those examples of trees and woodland that are prime examples of this. We continue to engage with landowners and other key stakeholders in the development of these covenants and we continue to explore how they can be utilised to successfully create, manage and protect trees and woodlands for the public good.

⁸⁷ <http://www.breakingnewground.org.uk/>

⁸⁸ https://highlodgeheritage.fotf.org.uk/?utm_source=fotf.org.uk&utm_medium=project&utm_campaign=hhl

⁸⁹ https://www.forestryengland.uk/high-lodge/heritage-trail-high-lodge?utm_source=FoTF&utm_medium=affiliate

⁹⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687147/The_UK_Forestry_Standard.pdf

119. With the introduction of Environmental Land Management in 2024 land managers will be paid for delivering a number of public goods, including for beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment⁹¹. This could help provide payment for heritage asset management in the long term beyond the Nature for Climate Fund.

Food security

Agroforestry and provisions

120. The Government committed in the 25 YEP to support farmers to plant trees on their land, as well as to restore habitats for endangered species, recover soil fertility and to restore nature and increase biodiversity. Simultaneously, we will ensure food is still produced sustainably and profitably, contributing to UK food security⁹².

121. Trees and farmland can be integrated – for example, agroforestry as a land use system produces a range of ecosystem services, alongside food production⁹³. Agroforestry as a land use system can mimic and support nature's functions while remaining productive at the same time⁹⁴, and has been shown to increase yields and improve farm livelihoods especially amongst at risk food producers⁹⁵. Agroforestry therefore has potential advantages over traditional land use systems in that it offers extensive multi-functionality and a broad range of environmental services.

122. It is important to highlight the importance of multipurpose trees grown for the direct provision of food, such as fruit and nuts, for both animals and humans and thereby helping to achieve food security for England. Tree planting and woodland creation also helps to improve biodiversity and restore nature. Biodiversity is essential for sustaining the ecosystems which provide us with food, reinforcing the importance of trees to food supply chains.

⁹¹

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/elm/elmpolicyconsultation/supporting_documents/ELM%20Policy%20Discussion%20Document%20230620.pdf

⁹²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727252/national-adaptation-programme-2018.pdf

⁹³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10457-009-9229-7>

⁹⁴ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/8/6/574>

⁹⁵ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1940082917720667>

Trade-offs

123. Our plans for trees are being developed alongside those to support an agricultural sector that provides food security, with trees and farming alongside each other within land holdings. For example, we have estimated that it may be feasible to expand up to an additional 1.6m ha of woodland from which thinnings and residuals could be used for bioenergy, minimising impact on land prioritised for food production and protected landscapes, with the UK having a climate well suited to grow biomass. We are developing a new cross-government Biomass Strategy that will look at how biomass should be sourced and used to make the best contribution to net zero⁹⁶. We will set out more details about this in the forthcoming Energy White Paper. An integrated approach such as this is required to manage the competing demands on our land and to ensure that we can utilise it efficiently. This will allow us to balance the demands for sustainable food with trees and their associated benefits and products.
124. The Environmental Land Management scheme will provide an opportunity for farmers to derive an additional income stream through the delivery of environmental benefits as CAP is phased out. It will help deliver environmental benefits, paying foresters, farmers and other land managers to improve and enhance our environment and maintaining land management practices that secure environmental public goods. This importance of this scheme is outlined in 'The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution'⁹⁷.

Creating commercial opportunities from forestry, tourism and recreation

125. Forestry is a key component to a green economy, with the industry employing thousands and providing sustainable materials to help achieve a green recovery from the economic impacts of Covid-19. UK woodlands have an asset value of approximately £129.7 billion, with timber representing £8.9 billion of this⁹⁸.

Timber and wood products

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928005/government-response-to-ccc-progress-report-2020.pdf

97

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936567/10_POI_NT_PLAN_BOOKLET.pdf

98 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/woodlandnaturalcapitalaccountsuk/2020>

126. Timber is a low-emission building material, and sustainable use of timber products can reduce emissions from construction, lock up carbon long-term, and drive investment into our domestic forestry sector. We therefore committed in the 25 YEP and Clean Growth Strategy to increase the use of timber in construction, knowing what a contribution this can make to net zero within the land use and construction sectors. Delivery of this will be integrated alongside the government's commitment to building safety.
127. We want to see the expansion and use of the Grown in Britain certification mark throughout the supply chain. This will encourage the growth and investment into the domestic woodland creation and timber industry, also helping to decarbonise the construction industry. We are also examining other ways to stimulate the domestic timber market and its use in the construction industry, such as encouraging the growth of necessary skills needed in green construction, design or forestry, amending public procurement standards to support Grown in Britain certified forest products, incorporating greater domestic sustainable material and indicating confidence and support for the long-term demand for domestic timber.

Recreation

128. There were an estimated 475.2m visits and 718m hours spent in UK woodlands in 2017. This service was valued at £515.5m, with visits to UK woodlands having increased by 39% since 2009⁹⁹. The total ecosystem asset value of UK woodlands in 2017 was approximately £129.7 billion, with recreation services representing £22.5 billion of this. The importance of trees, woodland and green space to our enjoyment and wellbeing has been amplified this year, with woodlands providing recreational space outdoors and away from home. Creating more woodland will allow for more people to enjoy the benefits that trees provide.
129. Opportunities for recreation and visitor access are provided by woodlands great and small across the country and there are leading examples from the public and charitable sectors. For example, Forestry England's freehold land is open access for the public to enjoy, attracting 235m visits per year from 26.9m people¹⁰⁰. The National Forest also provides opportunities to visitors, with a visitor economy accounting for more than £428m of visitor spending per annum. There were 8.7m visitors to the National Forest in 2019, over 5,000 tourism

⁹⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/woodlandnaturalcapitalaccountsuk/2020>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/forest-enterprise-england-annual-report-and-accounts-2018-to-2019>

related jobs generated and 43% of schools now having regular lessons with Forest School trained teachers and outdoor wooded classrooms¹⁰¹. The Community Forests Network also encourages community involvement and inclusion in the planting and protection of trees and other key green infrastructure in and around towns and cities. Network members integrate trees into areas of low canopy cover which lack green infrastructure, providing health and recreational opportunities for local communities¹⁰².

Other ecosystem services

130. Trees and woodlands provide a number of other wider natural capital benefits and ecosystem services that have not been detailed above. This includes flood risk alleviation and improving water and air quality; benefits we want to achieve through our tree planting programme.

Riparian planting

131. Riparian planting can improve water quality by reducing run-off as well as slowing water flow as part of natural flood management¹⁰³. The existing CS scheme offers grants for improvements to watercourses and associated riparian zones¹⁰⁴. Through the £5.7m funding for the Northern Forest we have also allocated £700,000 to Leeds City Council's Flood Alleviation Programme. This programme, delivered by the Environment Agency, includes creation of clough woodlands as part of a natural flood management approach to help prevent future flooding incidents in Leeds City¹⁰⁵.
132. Riparian planting provides great opportunities to help meet our goals set out in the 25 YEP for nature recovery, flood reduction and delivery of multiple biodiversity benefits. We will explore opportunities to establish more woodland along watercourses to help achieve our tree planting commitments, but also to deliver the wider benefits that this type of planting brings, including natural flood management, improving water quality and providing habitat along water courses.

Flood risk management

¹⁰¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/830268/nfc-annual-report-2018-2019-web.pdf

¹⁰² <https://www.communityforest-trust.org/englands-community-forests>

¹⁰³ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/woodland-for-water-woodland-measures-for-meeting-water-framework-directive-objectives/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/supply-and-plant-tree-te4>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/successful-bid-for-funds-to-plant-thousands-of-trees>

133. Woodlands and forests help reduce flood flows and can make an important contribution to natural flood management, in which natural features and characteristics are used to slow down and store more flood water within upstream catchments. Woodland can reduce flood risk as:

- Trees generally evaporate more water than other types of vegetation, which can reduce the volume of flood water draining from the land.
- Soils under woodland tend to be better structured than under other land uses, enabling infiltration of more storm rainfall into the soil rather than run-off on the surface. This promotes the retention of flood water within soils and delaying its passage to watercourses.
- Trees, shrubs and deadwood, particularly along stream sides and within floodplains, exert a greater drag on flood waters compared to grass, delaying flood flows.
- Tree cover protects the soil, decreasing soil erosion and the delivery of sediment to watercourses, which helps reduce siltation and thereby increases the capacity of main river channels to safely convey flood waters downstream.

134. Woodland creation needs to be carefully targeted for natural flood management, and is generally most effective in reducing local floods generated by rapid run-off from small catchments (<10 km²) but may also help in medium-sized catchments (10-100 km²). The annualised value of flood regulation services of existing woodland in Great Britain amounts to approximately £60-88 per hectare, or a total value of £218.5m¹⁰⁶.

Water quality

135. Across England, 86% of rivers failed to reach the Water Framework Directive's good ecological status in 2016 due to agriculture and rural land use, wastewater, urban and transport pressures¹⁰⁷. Woodland creation and tree planting have a potentially important role to play in reducing agricultural diffuse water pollution, helping to meet water quality targets. Woodland plays both a barrier and interception function, helping to trap and retain nutrients (phosphates and nitrates) and sediment in polluted runoff. Targeted woodland buffers along mid-slope or downslope field edges, and by riparian woodland alongside water courses is particularly effective in slowing down runoff and intercepting sediment

¹⁰⁶https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/5499/Final_report_valuing_flood_regulation_services_051218.pdf

¹⁰⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/709493/State_of_the_environment_water_quality_report.pdf

and nutrients. Wider targeted woodland planting in the landscape can reduce fertiliser and pesticide loss into water, as well as protecting the soil from regular disturbance and so reduce the risk of sediment delivery to watercourses¹⁰⁸.

Air quality

136. Aside from sequestering carbon dioxide, trees also help to clear the air. Plants are involved in the uptake, transport and assimilation of many gaseous pollutants (sulphur dioxide, ammonia, ozone and nitrogen dioxide) and particulates. Trees can therefore play a significant role in improving urban air quality, and in mitigating for some of the negative effects of pollutants. Trees and other greenspace can effectively act as a sink for many pollutants¹⁰⁹ and it has been estimated that in 2017, the removal of pollution by woodland in the UK equated to a saving of £938m in health costs¹¹⁰.

Q6. 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?

137. The ETS will be published in early 2021, following the consultation this summer¹¹¹. This will outline the policy and strategy mechanisms to protect and manage our existing trees and woodland in England. The Environment Bill will also introduce a number of new measures that will help to protect existing trees and woodlands. We already offer a number of grants for the purposes of woodland management. We are exploring ways the Nature for Climate Fund can provide additional funding over this Parliament to help protect and manage the woodlands in England, and how the Environmental Land Management scheme could contribute to this from 2024 onwards.

Funding

138. Government grants and incentives to support woodland management in England are already in place. This includes the CS woodland management plan grant for farmers and land managers to produce a woodland management plan

¹⁰⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/291522/scho0711btyr-e-e.pdf

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/urban-regeneration-and-greenspace-partnership/greenspace-in-practice/benefits-of-greenspace/improving-air-quality/>

¹¹⁰<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/woodlandnaturalcapitalaccountsuk/2020#overall-quantity-and-value-of-woodland-ecosystem-services>

¹¹¹ <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/england-tree-strategy/>

that meets UKFS requirements¹¹². Government also offers the CS woodland improvement grant, which provides funding to improve the biodiversity of woodland and/or make it more resilient to climate change¹¹³, and the woodland infrastructure grant which provides funding to allow woodlands to be more accessible by road. This allows timber and other forest products to be moved more easily and improves the management of the woodland¹¹⁴. A CS woodland tree health grant is also available, to help protect and improve the resilience of woodlands, and to restore woodland after damage by a tree disease or pest¹¹⁵.

139. We will build upon these existing grants and provide public funding for tree and woodland management in England over this Parliament. Long term active sustainable management is required if we want to maximise the benefits that trees and woodlands provide. Through the ETPP, we will bring England's woodland under management where appropriate to increase the extent and quality of woodland and associated habitats and functions. The Environmental Land Management scheme will pay for public goods including the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, thriving plants and wildlife and beauty, heritage and engagement; all of which the protection and management of existing woodlands can provide.

140. In addition to this, the Government announced a Nature Recovery Fund, which will bring together businesses, landowners and local communities to protect and restore habitats, species and landscapes so nature can thrive everywhere. £30m from the Nature for Climate Fund and £10m from the Nature Recovery Fund has also been brought forward as part of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, so that investment can drive a green recovery from Covid-19. All of these may support the protection, management and improvement of tree and woodland habitats in different ways.

141. Given the scale of our long-term ambitions, a blend of public funding with private investment will be required, for example through the encouragement of tree and woodland protection, creation and management by developers through Biodiversity Net Gain, which is to be introduced through the Environment Bill. We are also seeking ways to enable further development of private investment and green finance, to pay for the ecosystem services that trees provide¹¹⁶, further outlined in our response to Q2 (Paragraph 34).

¹¹² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/woodland-management-plan-grant-countryside-stewardship>

¹¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/woodland-improvement-wd2>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/woodland-infrastructure-fy2>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woodland-tree-health-grant-leaflet-countryside-stewardship/woodland-tree-health-grant-leaflet>

Legislation

142. The Forestry Act (1967)¹¹⁷ is the principal regulation for managing England's woodland, providing a licensing regime for almost all tree felling. The licensing regime's remit is to licence tree felling as part of maintaining a strategic timber reserve, rather than for environmental reasons and the regime is underpinned by government policies on permanence, such as the Open Habitats Policy¹¹⁸ which controls the rate and nature of deforestation activity. The Forestry Act works alongside other regulations such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981¹¹⁹ when assessing tree felling proposals. This is to ensure that wider environmental protections are accounted for, and where required, associated licences or consents issued under different regulation are also delivered.
143. At a strategic level, the Forestry Act remains relevant and broadly effective. However, the legislation aligns less effectively with today's wider land ownership demographic and sustainability agenda. We also continue to observe non-compliance with the Forestry Act at an increasing rate. We are considering ways to update the Forestry Act to make it fit for the modern day. This could allow for the withdrawal or suspension of licences and the widening of the conditions that can be included in a licence to cover other activities, to support woodland management in line with the UKFS. Examples of this could include conditions on the timing of forestry works, actions to control pests and diseases, biosecurity, biodiversity and record keeping.
144. The Government will be introducing conservation covenants through the Environment Bill, as outlined in our response to Q.5 (Paragraph 118). We continue to engage with landowners and other key stakeholders in the development of these covenants and we continue to explore how they can be utilised to successfully manage and protect woodlands.
145. Through the Environment Bill we are delivering on our pre-existing commitments to protect existing trees and woodlands. We will place a duty on local highway authorities to consult with local communities before felling urban street trees¹²⁰. We will provide guidance for local highway authorities in due course. This will give the public an opportunity to understand why a tree is being

¹¹⁶ <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/england-tree-strategy/>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/10/contents>

¹¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-consent-to-convert-woodland-to-open-habitats>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

¹²⁰ <https://publications.Parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2019-2019/0003/en/003en57.htm>

felled, raise concerns in regards to the felling and increase transparency around decisions over street trees. Forestry Enforcement Measures will also be introduced by the Bill, strengthening the FC's ability to deter illegal tree felling across England¹²¹.

Planning and development

146. We need to go further in protecting our existing trees and woodlands from development where appropriate. In 2016-2017, 822ha of woodland was lost across England¹²², 537ha (65.3%) of which was attributable to development. We are also exploring ways we can further protect ancient woodland, building on the existing strong policy already in place through the NPPF¹²³, National Planning Practice Guidance¹²⁴ and Standing Advice on Ancient Woodlands, Ancient and Veteran trees¹²⁵. To ensure that this policy and guidance is followed in planning decisions, we are supporting the completed revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory¹²⁶ and also carrying out research to better understand the role of buffer zones in protecting ancient woodlands from development. We are seeking ways to do this through the ETPP.

147. We are also working across government to consider ways to protect trees and woodlands in the planning system, reflecting the true value of the ecosystem services they deliver as national assets, including to the development sector itself. For example, we are looking into the potential of clarifying the criteria for Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). Currently local planning authorities are able to apply a TPO to protect specific trees, groups of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity¹²⁷. We are looking at ways to ensure greater clarification of the criteria for implementing a TPO, including considering ecosystem service values as a criteria and not just amenity. Clarifying the criteria could also improve consistency in the application of TPOs across local planning authorities.

¹²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-bill-2020/30-january-2020-environment-bill-2020-policy-statement#:~:text=The%20Environment%20Bill%20introduces%20'Duty,express%20any%20concerns%20regarding%20this.>

¹²² <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/national-forest-inventory/>

¹²³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

¹²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

¹²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

¹²⁶ https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/a14064ca50e242c4a92d020764a6d9df_0

¹²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-preservation-orders-and-trees-in-conservation-areas>

Deer and squirrel management

148. In terms of specific protection and management opportunities, there are natural and cost-effective approaches we could take. Reintroducing native species would prove a natural approach to woodland management, such as introducing pine marten to manage the grey squirrel population which can damage newly planted trees and woodlands.
149. Deer populations negatively impact the successful establishment of trees, and grey squirrels strip tree bark, deforming trees and reducing their value. This has a negative effect on woodland condition reducing structural diversity and natural regeneration, and reducing associated populations of ground flora and invertebrates. Pressures from deer also increase the cost of woodland expansion, requiring the use of expensive and intrusive deer fences which can impede access and traditional movements of deer to find food and shelter, as well as limiting the range of species that can be used for woodland creation. This could prevent the establishment of a diverse mix of tree species, potentially impacting the resilience of our national tree stock to future climatic conditions. Through policy and strategy development, we are seeking ways to better support landowners with the effective management of their tree stock from deer and grey squirrel populations, including the potential of providing support to land managers for deer control and fencing and supporting further testing and trial of non-plastic tree guard alternatives.