

Written evidence submitted by The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) (TPW0054)

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The LWA is a union of over 1000 farmers and foresters , from all around the UK. We have about 200 members actively involved in sustainable woodland management .

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

1.1. The target, while relatively large compared to recent achievements, is far too low. The first issue is that looking to 2050 is too late - by then we will have surpassed our allowable carbon budget if the UK is to play its part in limiting global heating to 1.5*. It is essential we act with more urgency and with a view of a tighter timeframe.

1.2 What is needed is a massive step change in approach, focus and intent; without that commitment , the exact target is relatively unimportant. What is needed is something akin to a 'war time' effort. The CCC Land Use report 2018 says " the current approach is unsustainable", yet so far - two years later - there has been no change of intent . Climate chaos is life threatening, urgent and critical, and the response to Covid shows what resources can be mobilised by governments when necessary.

1.3 Tree planting of the right type is a crucial pathway to see gains across many sectors and areas: human health, climate, job creation, biodiversity and nature improvements. Once we have committed to deep and structural change, and the funding to go with it, then we can look at the exact hectares we are aiming for. If we focus on the area of trees without that commitment we are being distracted from the main issue. It is also pointless if we do not have very ambitious targets to reduce fossil fuel use which is the cause of the bulk of the emissions.

1.4 Any new afforestation should correspond with revitalising unmanaged existing woodland. Roughly 50% of existing woodland in the UK is unmanaged or not managed at all. All the research points to the fact that restoring the management in these woodlands, given the right incentives to owners and managers, can do far greater short term good in addressing carbon sequestration, biodiversity and economy than any new planting.

1.5 The target depends on what assumptions we make. Are we intending to soak up emissions from just the agriculture and land use sector, or from the rest of society and the economy? Has there been widespread dietary change to reduce overall meat consumption? What activities are we supporting overseas? Are our peatlands still emitting millions of tonnes of CO2 because of bad practice, or has that been halted? In the absence of clear answers to these questions we would posit that 100,000 hectares annually is more like a necessary - and moreover, achievable - target in the next few years, although millions of

new hectares will be needed eventually, depending on what level of CO2 we want to soak up, and what other routes we pursue etc.

1.5 Aiming to double our UK woodland cover to 6.2 M ha , about 26% of the UK land area, might seem unrealistic. However it is still well below the EU average of 38%. France, Germany , Italy and Spain all have % forest cover higher than 26%. It also need not be viewed as an invasion of either wholly unmanageable wilderness or monocultural coppiced willow. It is entirely possible, with the right approach , to create a mosaic landscape in which trees form an essential part - with a mixture of orchards, native woodland, coppice, mixed plantation, hedges and shelterbelts all playing their part.

The experience of Covid should allow us to reconsider what we mean by terms like 'realistic'. It is more useful to discuss what are the political, cultural and economic barriers to achieving what is necessary.

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

2.1 To some degree, yes. But they are chronically underfunded to do the job that is necessary, as well as lacking expertise and supportive policy. To inject the relevant level of funding and focus into current organisations is one possible pathway, but this will require new political direction and leadership.

2.2 Equally possible is to set up new structures working both nationally and then regionally, that bring together the relevant people, government departments, funding , data analysis, and local authorities.

2.3 Two of the things that are needed are as follows.

A land mapping, data gathering system and co-design process to help decide what and where trees should go, and which can look at the different human and nature interests at a local and regional level.

A proper outreach service to landowners and farmers to explain what is needed and work with them on design , planning and the paperwork . This will need significant resources to ensure the correct training for people and that there is clarity of purpose and support to ensure a proper amount of trust between parties, given that woodlands need to be protected long term to ensure carbon remains sequestered.

2.4 What is needed is long term certainty, good regulation, proper funding, committed officers on the ground, and prompt and efficient administration.

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

3.1 Scotland is clearly achieving higher planting targets than the rest of the UK. Although even there it is far beneath the level that is needed. One reason Scotland has been successful is making a clear link between more tree planting and the benefits to the economy, environment and society.

3.2 A more open minded approach from central government to learn from the experience of the devolved nations could be useful here.

3.3 It is also possible to learn a lot from a country like Norway which has seen very high levels of re-forestation over the last fifty years, primarily as a result of a targeted approach to reducing grazing pressure. Of course there are a different set of circumstances in Norway, but that does not exclude learning from other countries.

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

4.1 Political support and comprehensive funding were not in place. This of course affects activities on the ground in many ways.

4.2 There was a lack of political leadership . The administrative and funding process was too complicated and remote and with too little available help. There was a lack of publicity and information on how and why the grants were available. There was no holistic thinking across the different sectors of health/community access/jobs/industry/ recreation. There was an absence of information about the long term benefits for landowners and farmers across a range of issues, and of course this was coupled with an actual lack of financial help.

4.3 There has to be an administrative system that is able to promptly decide if farmers and landowners are to be supported with their ideas or plans, and then is able to work with them efficiently to get the job done.

4.4 Of course there also has to be a good network of contractors and suppliers who are able to roll out the plantings and the associated work like ground preparation and fencing, without too much delay. Currently there are not enough tree nurseries with local stock, a shortfall of ecological consultants to advise on the detailed species content, a lack of fencing contractors or groundwork companies with local knowledge and the links to support the local economy - and so on. All this needs to be addressed in a systematic way.

4.5 What we need to learn is that we need a comprehensive approach, and that previous targets have failed because the market was overly privileged as the only modern way to get things done. Alongside this, our environment organisations have been down-graded and under-funded, which means expert ecological oversight has been lacking. This has been coupled with a faith that we

could import most of our material goods from overseas , but this has led to an under resourced timber industry and a failure to plan for sufficient timber to come from our own shores. This dependence not only undermined UK industry but has led to deforestation overseas and increased pressure on climate as countries burn or export their forests.

4.6 Policy has chopped and changed at the whim of political cycles and there has been no pressure on UK forestry to think long term, beyond fast rotations of low grade timber. Despite the cultural resonance of the 'English Oak' in this country most of our high quality oak for timber building comes from France, a country that has a long term approach to its forestry industry and prides itself on that.

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

- Mitigating or adapting to climate change;
- Promoting biodiversity and nature recovery;
- Increasing biosecurity and plant health;
- Improving human well-being and health;
- Protecting natural and cultural heritage;
- Food security;
- Creating commercial opportunities from forestry, tourism and recreation; and

5.1 It would be a mistake to try and rank these objectives against each other. It is perfectly possible to achieve them all with the holistic approach we are advocating. Government should be trying to achieve high levels of tree cover, thus sequestering all our carbon emissions, creating a rebound in biodiversity, and seeing a huge expansion of the UK timber industry. These woodlands can of course also be excellent for recreation and mental health if the public is given the information and access agreements to make it possible.

5.2 It is essential that a holistic approach is taken that sees the interdependence of these things. A single woodland can do all these things, and there is no reason why planting schemes could not plan for all of them - although obviously there may well be situations that demand that some priorities take precedence over others in specific cases or at specific times. But what is needed is a joined up approach.

5.3 Food security is perhaps a slightly separate case , as not all UK adapted species are good for food. Here the government should be clear in its support for agroforestry and seeing the role of multipurpose trees on farms. Agroforestry has huge potential to increase production whilst giving big nature and climate gains.

5.4 There is a particular role for hedgerows here. Hedges are a fundamental feature of much of our countryside, and have seen thousands of miles of losses over the last 100 years, primarily to make way for intensive agriculture and subsequent larger machines. It is time to restore them, both in quality and quantity. As shelterbelts and strips of perennial species between crops they can provide both fruits and nuts and timber in their own right, and also nature corridors and carbon sequestration too.

5.4 It is beyond the scope of this document to delve into all the ways in which we could boost the supply and processing of UK timber products. However the need to do so should not be in doubt. Although incurring a cost in the present, investing in UK timber and reducing our imports through regulation or tariffs will have huge gains for mitigating climate and restoring UK employment in the future. This means support right the way from new planting schemes, to processing hubs and training, to retail outlets that can source UK products.

6) Are the right policies and funding in place to appropriately protect and manage existing woodlands in England? How will prospective changes to policy and legislation effect this?

6.1 No. About half of all woodland in the UK is under managed or not managed at all. Policies should make clear the importance and responsibilities of managing existing woodland, while greater support and funding is needed for the small scale and traditional timber industries that can make overstood woodland viable. This should coincide with further education and development of skilled labour to implement the surveying, planting and future management of woodland nationwide.

6.2 There is a severe lack of resources available to properly monitor, police and protect existing woodland, especially SSSI's.

6.3 As detailed in 4.1 - 4.6 above, a systematic overhaul is needed of objectives and processes to protect what we have and expand our woodland and tree cover along the right lines.

6.4 The LWA Manifesto offers a great deal more information on these issues. :

<https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Forestry-Manifesto-LWA-final.pdf>

6.5 We would endorse the comment in the submission by Confor: "One policy change that is needed to better protect existing woodlands is much greater control of pests damaging trees such as grey squirrels and deer. This subject was considered as part of the England Tree Strategy consultation and Confor encourages swift government action on the suggestions made for new and novel ways to stop the damage caused by grey squirrels to young trees in particular."