

Written evidence submitted by The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) (TPW0058)

1. Introduction

1.1 The HTA is the trade association for the UK ornamental horticulture industry. The sector encompasses large multinational chains, family-run businesses, and small independents throughout the country including plant nurseries, garden retailers, landscapers, and garden goods manufacturers of all sizes.

1.2 We count amongst our membership the majority of nurseries growing young trees and also suppliers into the amenity landscape sector. Accordingly, we have a keen interest in Government policy regarding trees, woodlands, and forestry.

1.3 The total horticulture sector (including horticulture tourism and commercial landscaping), is worth £24bn to the UK economy and supports over 560,000 jobs directly and indirectly. £5.4 billion in tax revenues were linked to the sector in 2018.

1.4 The mental and physical benefits of being in nature-based spaces are well-established. Horticulture resonates throughout nature and the landscape we all have around us. With 25 million people regularly gardening, the UK is a nation of gardeners. During the 1st COVID-19 lockdown 3 million more people took up gardening as a hobby and many more realised the benefits of being outside in the natural landscape.

1.5 Horticulture is essential in supporting half of the policies within the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and underwrites many of the nation's wider ambitions for climate change. The HTA welcomes this opportunity to submit evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee.

2. Summary of evidence

2.1 The HTA fully supports the ambitions the Government has in place and believes in the strategic overall policy of increasing tree cover in England. However, the HTA queries if the right policies are in place to achieve the targets stated, let alone increase them.

2.2 There are some broad brush considerations to make including looking at forest & woodland creation in a more holistic way, ensuring cross-border collaboration with policies and actions that are aligned between all nations.

2.3 Policies need to underpin and support the sourcing of trees for planting to ensure there are clear and sustainable supply lines of stock, sourcing within the UK is the preferred option, while ensuring that the right species are sourced and are planted in the right place.

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

3.1 The HTA welcomes the UK Government's targets to set the ambition and keep the issue high profile and focused. However, delivering the targets will depend on having the right structures, policies and support in place in England. To achieve the targets the HTA believes that much greater focus needs to be given across Government, from Ministers down, to

ensure the importance of tree policy is embedded across Government, including across Departments, including BEIS and MHCLG, as well as Defra.

3.2 There are challenges that need addressing, such as competing environmental schemes – for example landowners may perceive greater benefits from taking up other initiatives such as solar panels rather than planting trees. If such policy incentives for tree planting were introduced by Government for landowners and championed by Ministers across Government, this could go some way to giving tree nurseries the confidence to increase production to the levels required. However, at present it is questionable whether growers have that confidence to see that there will be an increased market of sufficient volume at the end of growing cycles.

3.3 The HTA believes it is important to look at forest/woodland creation in the context of a broader and holistic view of land management in general including the (sometimes) conflicting demands of land used for food production, energy production as well as public access/recreation/tourism and house building/commercial development/infrastructure. The HTA believes it is important that the right trees are planted in the right places in order to maximise the long term benefits to nature and the environment, as well as ensuring that trees do not perish and can survive in the long term. This means that species are identified, sourced, and planted in the environment best suited to their needs in order that they may flourish. This may mean utilising non-native species and selecting new strains of native species that are resistant to climate change and or pests and diseases.

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

4.1 The commitment to planting 30,000 trees a year and protecting and restoring our natural environment as part of the Government's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution is welcome. However, following the announcement that the number of trees planted with Government support dropped this year, the Government needs to ensure that the right structures are in place to ensure that UK tree production can help achieve these targets as the country recovers from COVID-19.

4.2 The HTA questions whether the current structures are adequate to ensure that the UK wide target is delivered. Many HTA members have pointed out the differences in structures between England and Scotland, highlighting that the single-minded focus and approach adopted in Scotland is much more likely to deliver the desired result. The HTA believes that the proliferation of bodies involved in seeking to increase tree planting in England can lead to confusion and delay in achieving the desired increase in planting.

4.3 The HTA also has concerns that other Government policies and structures stand in the way of growers having the ability and confidence to increase production of young trees. These concerns relate to, amongst other issues:

- The ability of growers to access sufficient casual labour (specifically migrant labour under the Seasonal Agricultural workers Scheme) to hand grade young trees
- The ability of growers and traders to import young stock post-EU Exit
- The difficulties associated with securing planning permissions

4.4 The HTA welcomes the Government's Urban Tree Challenge Fund as a way to bring focus to urban tree planting. Ensuring that tree planting targets are met will require both forestry and urban planting. Urban woodland accounts for 7.5% of total UK woodland.

4.5 Trees planted in urban settings need maintenance which has not always happened in the past as responsibility is often passed between local government departments. Ensuring that local governments have the capabilities to maintain trees in the long term in urban settings is crucial to make sure that planting efforts are not wasted.

4.6 UK tree producers also have rigorous plant health standards, including the internationally-leading Ornamental Horticulture Assurance Scheme, a specialist group of the HTA, which requires members to be independently inspected and audited. Ensuring the right structures are in place for UK tree producers to expand operations will reduce our reliance on imports in the long-term and the potential for pests and diseases to be brought into the UK from abroad.

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

5.1 The HTA believes that, from our experience, there is relatively good co-ordination between the four nations on issues such as biosecurity and plant health. Indeed, the EFRA Committee may wish to consider whether the Plant Health Alliance might provide some lessons for a suitable structure moving forward.

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

6.1 Please refer to our earlier answers regarding focus, structures, and policy (particularly Q4)

7. 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.

7.1 The HTA recognises the importance of all the policy areas identified. However, as indicated earlier the HTA believes that, unless this is included as a broader policy of land use – including energy production - the inclusion of food security as a priority potentially signals to growers that the UK Government believes tree planting (and ornamental horticulture production in general) is of less importance than production of edibles. This has the danger of reducing confidence in participants with a consequent knock-on effect of the industry's ability to deliver the desired outcomes.

7.2 Several HTA members have highlighted their concerns that, with the very welcome drive to increase tree numbers, there is a danger that seeds to underpin that production increase

may only be collected from a relatively small selection of parent trees. This could result in a reduction in genetic diversity to the detriment of the natural environment. Therefore, consideration should be given as to how and where seed is collected.

8.1 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?

8.1 The protection and management of existing woodlands is outside the remit of the HTA. Accordingly, we offer no comment on this question.

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