

## Written evidence submitted by Forest School Association (TPW0076)

### Government Ambition

1. The government target is to be planting 30,000 Ha per year by 2025 and to increase the land area from 10% to 12% by 2060. This would still mean the UK is one of the lowest in Europe. We, the Forest School Association and The Children's Forest, feel this is not ambitious enough given the recent years have seen depletion of tree cover. If we are to realise more effective carbon capture and a reverse of all the declines we are witnessing, in species diversity and human mental and indeed physical health, tree cover needs to increase more than this target. In addition, the development of ancient and semi natural woodland needs to stop. With the probable decline in livestock farming due the changing diets in contemporary society and the increased awareness of the carbon production involved in meat farming there will be more opportunity to see increased woodland and tree cover as we convert land from livestock farming to other 'plant-based' regimes. If, for example every person in the population just planted two new trees every year we could be planting almost 25,000 Ha per year (see Hemery, 2016). If this were to be combined with concerted effort from the woodland/forestry sector we could be increasing the land area at least from 10% to 15% by 2060, still leaving us near the bottom of the European countries percentage land cover by trees and forests. Providing the government puts resources into skilled planting, increasing woodland and forestry professionals working in the sector, and into supporting local communities involved in tree planting, establishing the right woods and trees in the right places, an increased target could be realised. This is of course if also the correct financial incentives and grant aid schemes are in place.

### Structures

2. We feel more local structures and support are required. In previous years when local authorities had more resource local tree officers, working alongside the government agencies were more effective in encouraging more tree planting. There needs to be more local 'experts' on hand to support landowners wanting to plant up woodlands and forests and for community tree planting – it's these relationships that gain trust. The 'Community Forests', the first being the 'National Forest' in the Midlands have all been successful in both tree planting/woodland creation and community engagement/increased employment in woodland and tree related occupations and we suggest that these are set up in every region of the country. Community Forests engage with all aspects of society from early years, youth and school groups through to colleges, universities, community groups and 'industry' groups.
3. There should be more effective 'partnerships between land based industries'. This could start by seeing DEFRA giving an increasing status to the woodland and forestry sector and integrating woodlands into the farming sector such that woodland and forestry is given a much bigger presence alongside food production. Ideally there needs to be more integration and synergy between Forestry England and the farming sections of DEFRA and this should flow down to local government officers as well as more collaboration between unions and other agencies. For example there should be much more cross sector groups

realising the importance of tree planting, i.e. between the education, youth, health sectors and woodland/forestry sector both at a national policy level and at the local 'wood-face' (forgive the pun). Also there needs to be the correct strategies and representative groups involved in the tree planting effort. This means in addition to the land-based government and non-government organisations the sector needs to reach out and form partnerships to reach everyone across society, including ALL minority groups and those living in 'poverty'.

### **Cross-border issues**

4. The Forest School Association is a UK wide organisation and there could be a lot more cross country working on biosecurity, plant health and continuous woodland and forest habitats. England could, for example, take many of the more Scottish and Welsh Government integrated environmental and education policy initiatives into the English government initiatives to engage the public in participating in these issues

### **Unmet previous targets**

5. Previous ambitions were not met partly because they were not given enough priority within the land based policies, the grant structures and levels were not enough to incentivise and there has not been enough priority given to generate a UK timber market, especially hardwood. Part of this is down to lack of education and we would like to see a much higher priority given to trees and woodlands in the formal curriculum to raise awareness of the importance of tree planting, trees and woodland in all sections of society, from this we should see greater support for initiatives like the government's tree strategy. This could be achieved through the investment of a Nature Premium [www.naturepremium.org](http://www.naturepremium.org).

There should also be more resources and prioritising of resources going into the training of professionals in this sector. Careers in forestry need to be promoted right across society so we see more trained professionals – from arboriculturalists, woodland creators, chain saw operators through to managers of large woodlands/forests. There also should be more integration and education in other work areas, for example from architecture and building through to planning and agriculture.

One of the other reasons for not hitting previous targets has been the lack of integration across government departments and the diminishing budgets and resources coming to local government and regional officers in the related government departments.

### **Policy Priorities**

6. Many of these are so intertwined that it hard to prioritise, without a healthy planet we have diminishing economic activity. As they overlap so here are our top three;  
Promoting Biodiversity and Nature recovery  
Mitigating and adapting to Climate change  
Improving human health and well-being

### **Current Policies**

7. At the present there are not the policies or enough incentives and support in place to realise the ambition. We need to tighten planning law and environmental law to include any developments or land-use changes that may damage woodland. Damage to semi-natural and ancient woodlands especially should not be permitted. Farmers and landowners need to be more incentivised through grant aid, possible tax incentives and a supported UK sustainable hardwood and 'mixed' timber market. Woodland and forestry careers should be on a par with the STEM subjects regarding careers and investments. Forestry and 'related' sector Employers need to be incentivised to take on the new apprenticeships and engage with the new 'T' qualifications, at the present the uptake is very low and the government needs to make this more financially viable for the employer. We need to have 'nature connection AND access to trees and woodlands including actively being involved in 'giving back to nature' as part and parcel of the education and health service. The research into nature connection and health improvement is all pointing to this being one of the 'cheapest' ways to improve mental health and well-being as well as improving attention and learning ability (Richardson, 2020)  
There need to be higher grant schemes to convert land to woodland and to plant trees and that allow more local access to trees and woodlands for the public and community groups, including education groups.

Hemery, G (2016) Plant a Tree for Every Year of your Life – see <https://gabrielhemery.com/plant-a-tree-for-every-year-of-your-life/>

Richardson, M (2020) Applying the Pathways to Nature Connectedness at a Societal level - see <https://findingnature.org.uk/2020/11/17/pathways-societal-scale/>

**December 2020**