

Written evidence submitted by BSW Timber group (TPW0078)

About BSW Timber Group

[BSW Timber Group](#) is the UK's largest fully integrated forestry company, founded in 1848. In 2015, the Company acquired Tilhill Forestry, the UK's leading forestry management and timber harvesting and marketing company, and in August 2019 Maelor Nurseries, based in Whitchurch, joined the group. We have offices and sawmills across the UK, where we employ 1,200 people, as well as Latvia and Slovenia. In February 2020, the company was acquired by Endless LLP, a change that allowed BSW Timber Group to continue its growth and contribution to the rural economy, most recently through the acquisition of the Building and Supply Solutions division of SCA Wood UK. Even with a national and international reach, being part of and contributing to the local community is an important part of how BSW Timber operates. Wherever we are based, we are committed to providing good jobs and training opportunities for young people.

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

The current UK-wide target of 30,000 hectares of new woodland per year matches the recommendation of the Committee on Climate Change published in their report "The UK's contribution to stopping global warming"¹. According to the Committee, this level of tree-planting would help the UK achieve its Net Zero target by 2050. BSW Timber welcomes and supports this objective. It is undeniable that it is very ambitious and that -so far- the Government has failed to meet its own commitments year after year. With Scotland the only country in the UK that is meeting its tree-planting targets, England, Wales and Northern Ireland need to step up their woodland creation work; to do this, the UK Government must preside over a very well-coordinated strategy based on close collaboration with the devolved administrations and the "right tree in the right place" principle.

We believe that the Government's carbon reduction requirements for the private sector and adequate offsetting policies could significantly progress the achievement of the tree-planting targets. Sponsorship of woodland creation schemes would be a very effective way for carbon-intensive companies to mitigate their carbon footprint during the transition towards Net Zero and for the Government to share its obligation with the private sector. More and better incentives should be considered.

One of the principal challenges will be finding the land to meet the target. For the past few years, we have been advocating for a land use policy that drives integration and decidedly moves away from the "farming versus forestry" narrative. For this reason, we welcome the recently published plans for the transition to a new agricultural policy², which, together with the proposals published so far for the England Tree Strategy³, we feel will encourage farmers and other land managers to take up tree-planting and identify suitable land on their holdings.

¹ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/>

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939925/agricultural-transition-plan.pdf

³ https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/england-tree-strategy/supporting_documents/englandtreestrategyconsultationdocument%20%20correctedv1.pdf

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

We recognise that the UK's decision to exit the EU set an important challenge for the Government to reconsider and redesign how different land uses are supported. We are pleased to see that the Government has made very good use of this opportunity through issuing new policies that have a fairer, less biased approach to all the different land-related activities. As mentioned above, *The Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024*⁴ recognises the importance of agroforestry and the adoption of tree-planting by farmers as vital ways to reduce emissions and restore soil, water and landscapes. Previous policies such as the appointment of a Tree Champion for England and the upcoming England Tree Strategy (expected in Spring 2021) also sent strongly positive signals to the forestry and timber sector that the Government is adopting a more supportive approach.

With so much legislation still subject to changes, the importance of statements from the Minister for the Environment guaranteeing continuity from the current system of grants (for example, the Countryside Stewardship) to the new post-Brexit schemes cannot be overestimated. Reaping the benefits -environmental and economic- from woodland creation takes a long time and many land managers and potential investors in trees have been looking for reassurance that new policies will not move the goalposts. Clarity about and confidence in the policy decisions and long-term objectives of the Government are absolutely crucial to deliver the tree-planting targets.

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

The devolution of the management of publicly owned forests and woodland creation regulations in 2019 has highlighted the different approach each nation within the UK has. Scotland, even before the devolution of responsibilities, made woodland creation a priority and commissioned a review of its tree-planting application system and requirements which allowed it to meet and exceed its own tree-planting targets. Wales is in the process of improving its tree-planting record and changing its application system. For years we have supported the calls of the Confederation of Forest Industries (Confor) for a similar review to take place in England aimed at streamlining the whole application and approval process. We hope that the England Tree Strategy, the farming support reforms and the commitment to a Green Recovery will be decisive in pushing the Government to take action.

We support the decision of the Government to retain a national approach to forestry research, plant health, and biosecurity as these are where close collaboration and one set of regulations and standards delivers the best results and protection.

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

The failure to meet Government targets of tree-planting in England derives, in our opinion, from a lack of clarity around the very tangible social, economic and environmental benefits tree-planting can deliver. The Government's previous commitment to plant 11 million trees by 2020 (Conservative Manifesto for the 2015 General Election⁵) was a stand-alone commitment with no further links to other

⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939925/agricultural-transition-plan.pdf

⁵ <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/ukmanifestos2015/localpdf/Conservatives.pdf>

policy objectives and issues facing the country. When competing with so many other issues and policy priorities, why should an isolated commitment to plant trees command any significant resources?

An accurate example of this is the Forestry Investment Zones (FIZ), a policy announced in the 2017 Clean Growth Strategy⁶ that had the whole sector very excited. A lack of proper preparation and consultation with local communities, businesses and authorities and, perhaps, of clear policy outcomes resulted in the first -and so far only- FIZ not progressing much further than the first tentative steps and failing to deliver the promised jobs and regeneration of remote areas in Cumbria and attract investment.

Worryingly, it seems that the same approach is still in use now, in the middle of a climate emergency. In recent days the UK Government has announced that, in its role as host of COP26 next year, it will commit to a reduction of carbon emissions of 68% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Such an ambitious, visible target does not allow any room for the missed opportunities that derive from disjointed, unconvincing policy making as seen above. It is imperative for the Government to establish an overarching Net Zero strategy that links all policies and decisions and ensures they are Net Zero-proofed.

With this approach, the argument for meeting the target would not be limited to planting trees to reduce carbon emissions but would go much further in setting out all the benefits trees can deliver. Planting the right trees in the right place delivers reductions in carbon emissions, beautiful landscapes, shade and shelter for domestic animals and wildlife; crucially, however, they also deliver very valuable green jobs spread evenly and fairly across the country, enrich rural communities and produces low-carbon, healthier and more energy efficient buildings. All things that have a big impact on people's every-day lives. It is vital to the success of the 30,000 hectares a year target that the Government has a clear set of interlinked policy objectives and policies that extend to the economy, health, transport, education and the environment. The forestry and timber sector would be keen to work with the Government to refresh the narrative around tree-planting and energise the public's support and efforts to achieve the target.

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

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

⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700496/clean-growth-strategy-correction-april-2018.pdf

It is important to stress that none of the above outcomes are in competition or contrast and that they would all follow a serious commitment to tree-planting and increasing the management of existing woodland according to existing sustainability standards.

Compliance with regulations and standards of biodiversity and sustainability is very high in the forestry and timber sector is very high, generally driven by market demand for high quality, certified products. Even for biomass use, there should be certification that show the wood in question is of the appropriate grade and cannot be directed to any other use. Close collaboration between the Government and the sector to achieve the right balance of productive and non-commercial forests would deliver the other priorities listed above. With softwood supply forecast to decline over the next decades, it is vital that the Government supports the right mix of tree-planting to secure the future of a green sector providing green jobs.

There needs to be no choice between the economic or environmental benefits, as healthy, well-managed, well-designed woodland with the appropriate infrastructure can deliver both.

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?

As stated above, we believe that better policy coordination across all departments and objectives is necessary to drive the uptake of sustainable management practices of the existing woodland across the UK. Good management can make a significant difference even in non-productive woodland, as it helps to increase the amount of carbon that can be absorbed by trees and soil.

Additional related policies that would be very helpful concern felling and restocking and the different uses of wood. Better checks and/or time limits on felling and restocking of productive forest would considerably improve the timber supply present and future, prevent manipulations of the market and contribute to the achievement of the Government target. Regulations around the use of wood would also make sure environmental targets are met: timber that could be processed for construction material and recycled into other wood products should not be used as biomass before its utilisation cycle is complete.

On all these issues, all players in the forestry and timber sector would be keen to collaborate with the Government to design the adequate policies and regulatory frameworks that can deliver wide-ranging benefits to the economy, society and the environment.

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