



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon the Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park  
Minister of State

Neil Parish MP (Chair)  
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

06 December 2021

Dear Neil,

## **EFRA SELECT COMMITTEE – Tree Planting and Woodlands Inquiry**

Following the EFRA Select Committee on 23 November 2021, the committee requested further information on several areas.

### **1. Right tree, right place**

**How does the work that the Forestry Commission and Natural England are doing to address gaps in data and mapping on protected habitats and landscapes and potential land for woodland creation, differ from the Rural Payments Agency's own mapping work? And what is the timescale for completing this work?**

- 1.1. I would firstly like to reassure you of the ongoing work on **mapping**, the difference between ALB action and the timescale for completion.
- 1.2. The Forestry Commission (FC) and Natural England's work is not about duplicating RPA's mapping, rather it is an ongoing process of making the best available data more accessible to people interested in woodland creation, adding new data layers as they become available.
- 1.3. The Forestry Commission's 'Low Risk Land Map for Woodland Creation' provides an easily accessible, broad screening of the major environmental constraints and sensitivities affecting forestry projects, identifying 3.2 million hectares of low-risk land. The tool

screens for protected landscapes, agriculturally high-quality land, priority habitat, important wildlife sites, deep peat, and Scheduled Monuments.

1.4. Significant changes have already been made to the FC's online browser to make it easier to identify constraints. We are planning further changes including the exclusion of all peaty soils and priority areas for upland breeding wader populations. We are aiming to incorporate the breeding waders' maps in time for the next breeding bird survey season.

**The England Trees Action Plan aims to streamline regulatory processes and strengthen environmental controls to meet the tree planting targets. What criteria will the Government use to ensure it does not weaken environmental controls? When will the Government consult on and conclude the review to ensure it supports the tree planting targets?**

1.5. The Committee was also interested in more information about **environmental controls** as we pursue our ambitions to meet tree planting targets. Through the Forestry Commission, we will continue to license planting through Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) regulations, ensuring compliance with environmental standards set out in the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS).

1.6. We will undertake a post implementation review of the 2017 changes to the Forestry Environmental Impact Assessment by May 2022, including work to reduce unnecessary delays whilst continuing to improve guidance and information on the sensitivities of new planting. The improvements to low-risk land data provide an opportunity to highlight land that would be beneficial to new planting that has already considered a wide range of economic, social and environmental factors.

**What are the timescales for the completion of the national habitat map and Local Nature Recovery Strategies?**

1.7. Regarding the timescale for completing the **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** (LNRS), Defra is keen to proceed swiftly having completed, in parallel to the Environment Bill, 5 LNRS pilots and a public consultation that closed on 2nd November. Defra is considering the responses received and will use them to inform regulatory and statutory guidance.

1.8. Defra and Natural England have begun engaging with local areas to identify suitable geographies and potential "responsible authorities" to lead the preparation of the approximately 50 LNRS, these will cover the whole of England with no gaps or overlaps.

1.9. To provide responsible authorities part of the necessary information for preparing these strategies, Defra and Natural England are working together to prepare the national habitat map.

**To provide information on Defra's work in relation to climate resilience, i.e. so that we will know what will be the right trees in the right places in future, e.g. 10, 15, 30?**

1.10. We have ensured that considerations for the implications of climate change are a requirement of applications to the England Woodland Creation Offer capital grant scheme. Defra and Forestry Commission have produced several resources to help those planting new woodlands to accommodate the impacts:

- Climate matching tool - Visualises the future climate, to aid decision making over the most appropriate seed origin of tree species.
- Ecological Site Classification decision support tool - Assesses the suitability of more than 60 species for any location in Great Britain, based on soil and climate. The tool includes both current climate and future climate projections.
- Managing England's Woodlands in a Climate Emergency guidance – Advises woodland managers on changes to forestry practice to ensure their woodlands remain resilient.
- UK Forestry Practice Guide – To be published over the coming months, it will set out how woodland managers can comply with the adaptation Good Practice Guidance requirement.

## **2. Financial incentives**

**How much of the budget has been put aside specifically to encourage better management of woodland?**

2.1. The Committee queried the funding for woodland management. £16.7m of funding from the Nature for Climate Fund (NCF) has been provisionally allocated for the better management of woodland. Please note that this figure is for Nature for Climate funding only and does not include any additional spend directly from the Forestry Commission.

**What is the timeline for when the ELM schemes related to woodland creation and management will be set out?**

2.2. All three Environmental Land Management Schemes will contribute to woodland creation and management. Regarding a timeline for the Environmental Land Management

(ELM) schemes we released further information on the Sustainable Farming Incentive earlier this month. This announcement included details on how the scheme will work in 2022 and plans to expand it over the following years. Indicative roll out dates for agro-forestry and on farm woodland are 2024 and 2025 respectively. We will make further announcements on Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery shortly, but we have already confirmed that Local Nature Recovery will be piloted from next year and will have a phased roll out from 2023. We have also confirmed that we will be launching at least 10 Landscape Recovery pilot projects between 2022 and 2024.

2.3. The ELM schemes will provide the main delivery mechanism for publicly funded woodland creation after 2024. To ensure a smooth transition, the England Woodland Creation Offer has been developed in parallel to these schemes, with payments for public goods and greater flexibility for land managers.

**To provide information about the operation of the Government’s carbon-offsetting scheme, which appears to have enabled British Airways to buy a sheep farm in Ceredigion in Wales, and then offset carbon-emissions from its flights, and whether this will lead to a reduction in the domestic production of lamb, and higher imports of lamb from other countries such as New Zealand or Australia?**

2.4. The Committee raised concerns regarding British Airways offsetting carbon-emissions from flights via a sheep farm in Ceredigion, Wales. The UK Land Carbon Registry has no records of British Airways’ involvement in a project at this stage, but this may be because it is not registered yet, or it is registered in the project developer’s name rather than BA’s and is not yet validated. The farm name and location would help us confirm whether any of the land is registered with the Woodland Carbon Code (WCC).

2.5. The WCC application process requires projects to consider whether carrying out the project will cause any emissions outside of the project boundary. The project design document should therefore consider emissions associated with lamb production needing to compensate for cessation of production on land associated with the project. Further detail is available on the Woodland Carbon Code website in sections [3.1 Carbon baseline](#) and [3.2 Carbon leakage](#).

**To provide an update on the environmental consequences of the Drax Power Station, in terms of its reliance on the burning of biomass, which includes trees, whilst at the same time, the UK is attempting to reach its commitments on tree planting?**

2.6. The committee also requested an update on the environmental footprint of the Drax Power Station. Sustainable biomass plays a vital role in UK’s decarbonisation efforts and

is an important part of UK's renewable energy mix. Sustainable biomass, compared to fossil fuels, is considered a renewable, low carbon energy source. This is because the carbon that is released from the organic material was sequestered recently from the atmosphere, compared to fossil fuels where the carbon was sequestered hundreds of millions of years ago.

- 2.7. The UK only supports biomass which complies with strict sustainability criteria and generators only receive subsidies for compliant biomass. Biomass is only considered a low carbon energy source when it derives from sustainable sources and provides greenhouse gas emissions savings.
- 2.8. The UK's sustainability criteria, some of the most stringent in the world, require that when used, forestry residues and wood products are sourced from forests that adhere to sustainable forest management practices only.
- 2.9. These include specific greenhouse gas criteria, which set out that biomass used to generate electricity does not exceed a set threshold and includes a minimum emission saving percentage, compared to fossil fuels. The greenhouse gas calculations require all greenhouse gas emissions in the supply chain must be accounted for, including those from transport, growing, and biomass processing (e.g., drying or pelleting). There are also specific land criteria which consider a range of social, economic, and environmental issues, including protecting biodiversity and land use rights. The land criteria also include requirements around regeneration rates and sustainable harvesting in the sourcing regions, requiring that the carbon stock of the forest from which biomass derives is not decreased.
- 2.10. In practice this means utilising less merchantable components of conventional forestry operations, such as branches, inadequate quality thinning's, or residues that would be otherwise burned or left on the ground when harvesting.
- 2.11. The UK government remains committed to its targets on tree planting and woodland creation and that is why BEIS and Defra are collaborating on the Biomass Strategy, ensuring it aligns with our 25 Year Environment Plan and the England Trees Action Plan. As part of this joint work, we are evaluating the role of biomass, including biomass from sustainable domestic sources to meet net zero.

### **3. COP26 and deforestation**

**What specifically is the Government doing to reduce UK-demand for wood away from imports and to increase domestic production and consumption of UK timber instead?**

- 3.1. Lastly, the Committee questioned what the Government is doing to increase domestic production and consumption of UK timber. Our England Trees Action Plan (ETAP)

identifies timber in construction as key measure in encouraging the use and production of domestic timber and we have committed to working with stakeholders and across government to develop a policy roadmap to increase the use of timber in construction in both the public and private sectors.

3.2. We are also working to increase tree production in our domestic nursery sector by investing in current facilities and exploring innovative ideas and technologies to improve production capacity.

3.3. In addition, ETAP includes measures to encourage both supply and demand for UK grown timber, including:

- A new £1.5m Forestry Innovation Fund which will provide financial support to develop innovative timber products and to review our procurement policies to increase public demand for sustainably sourced timber.
- Working with Homes England and delivery partners to increase timber use in the delivery of housing programmes.
- Driving an increase in the use of Modern Methods of Construction, some forms of which can encourage use of sustainable materials such as timber.
- Encouraging research into barriers to uptake of timber, including looking at timber strength grades and the fire resistance of engineered timber structures.

I hope that this letter addresses the committee's questions and concerns. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours faithfully,



**THE RT HON THE LORD GOLDSMITH OF RICHMOND PARK**