

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/262/tree-planting-and-woodlands/>

## **Tree Planting and Woodlands**

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

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

England's woodlands and trees are a biocultural resource, the historic significance and importance of which is fundamental to the character of our landscapes, and we welcome recognition of this within the strategy. While new planting often offers valuable opportunities to reinforce and enhance this character, we feel it is also right that afforestation schemes take a realistic view about the need to balance environmental objectives and outcomes, specifically by seeking to avoid or mitigate detrimental impacts on cultural heritage or wider historic landscape character. This requires an approach that not only ensures landscape character is understood and enhanced but also acknowledges the management needs of our existing trees and woodlands and ensures their resilience.

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

The UK Government's ambitious forestry targets will require the development of national and local policies, funding and incentive mechanisms, planning system changes, infrastructure such as saw-mills, markets, advice and guidance – as well as coordination between these.

Embedding the forestry targets within a wider land-use strategy would enable a joined-up approach to land management across government and its agencies and encourage synergies between strategies (e.g. peatland). This would enable engagement and recognition of trees and woodlands as a key part of our cultural heritage and identify planting opportunities shaped by landscape character which avoid detrimental forestry impacts.

To realise these ambitions at a local scale will require them to be suitably embedded within the local planning framework. Specifically, local plan policies will be needed, both relating directly to tree provision (and supporting the proposed Local Tree and Woodland Strategies), but also ensuring that forestry coverage is suitably addressed in the wider strategy for the area – and is consistent with policies for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. If produced as supplementary planning documents, linked to local plan policy, Local Tree and Woodland Strategies will have a clear status and an improved chance of delivery.

These strategies must also address the recreation and amenity needs of communities and recognise the role of our treescapes at all scales from streets, private gardens, local parks and

cemeteries, and woodlands, as well as the potential for new planting such as new housing development. Structuring the strategies around sense of place and historic landscape character encourages dialogue with communities about wider environmental aims and objectives and landscape change. It fosters a sense of empowerment and ownership, while delivering benefits such as improved health and well-being, better air quality, enhanced biodiversity, and carbon storage – which are key components of green infrastructure.

It is critical that guidance on strategies includes the historic and cultural significance of trees, woodlands and other features, and advice on their conservation.

The success of the policy, whether within an urban or rural landscape, will also depend on accessible and straight-forward funding mechanisms (a one-stop shop rather than an array of schemes). Expert advice and planting and woodland management guidance, including historic environment checks, is vital. For example, access tracks and processing facilities may have historic environment impacts.

British sourced and grown trees, and effective biosecurity, will be important. It should be noted however, that many designed historic landscapes and townscape have a fabulous heritage of introduced trees such as magnificent cedars, London planes and conifers and the conservation of these treescapes is also important. Indeed, climate change adaptation is already posing challenges about choice of species to succeed native British trees, which will benefit from being viewed through the lens of ‘the right tree in the right place’.

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

Historic England is a member of the Defra Plant Health Advisory Forum and finds the briefing on biosecurity and plant health useful. More information available on amenity tree species has become available however work is needed on assessing the climate change impacts and risks to trees and woodlands of historic parks and other amenity landscape features.

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

From climate change to pests and diseases, to a lack of wood processing facilities through to an under-developed market for wood products, these are some of the impacts on our existing woodlands. These problems need to be recognised and prioritised to enable foresters, novice woodland managers and land managers, whether agricultural or municipal to have the confidence to plant and manage trees and woodland.

There is a need for greater recognition of the length of time required to deliver the strategy and sustain the planting.

### **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?**

All woodland and trees, whether in a rural or urban context, will help deliver the tree strategy and the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan. Whether planted or through natural regeneration, the location of the trees and the public goods they deliver will be diverse. In some areas the main driver for planting will be recreation, in others it will protect and enhance cultural heritage, whilst in others it will relieve flooding – or it will be a mixture of these and others. All of Government’s policy objectives are therefore priorities and the key will be to balance competing needs and demands to ensure that priorities are addressed and integrated. We would also reiterate the point we made in relation to question 1, that it is important to strike a balance between a range of environmental objectives or outcomes, including for heritage and to recognise that all new planting takes place in an existing historic landscape context. This is central to the mantra of ‘right tree in the right place’ and will allow landscapes to evolve, framed by people’s sense of place.

For heritage it is important that:

- biocultural heritage and historic character are fully recognised (as encapsulated in Government plans to widen the definition of ancient woodland)
- environmental planning at scale includes cultural heritage and is informed by proportionate scoping and investigation of heritage significance
- historic landscape character is utilised to identify opportunities for new planting in both a rural and urban context
- there is consideration of the potential damage inappropriate trees or woodland and associated extraction and processing facilities can do to historic features and landscape
- the full societal benefits of hedgerow and in-field trees, veteran trees, wood pasture, urban trees and woodland are recognised and reflected through natural capital accounting
- trees and woodlands are well-managed and resilient to climate change
- tree disease and pests are recognised as a major threat to historic landscapes
- natural regeneration is appropriately targeted and takes account of historic landscape character
- there is effective protection for veteran and historic trees and woodlands
- existing trees and woodlands are well-managed and their potential as green infrastructure maximised
- tree and woodland management plans are long-term, and management resourced

**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?**

Tree and woodland strategies and management need to be long term, spanning many generations not just a few years. Funding that sustains and improves the management of existing trees and woodlands will require parity with funds to drive forward new planting programmes.

The forthcoming Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) will need to be available for a diverse range of historic tree and woodland features, from ancient semi-natural woodland to parkland woods and clumps, specimen and veteran trees, arboreta, avenues and other ornamental plantings, and orchards.

Training and guidance on care of historic trees and woodlands will be needed for owners, managers, arboriculturalists and foresters. Historic England values the work of the Ancient Tree Forum/Woodland Trust's advisory and training work, but funding is needed to enable these resources to be updated and shared more widely. The Tree Council also has an important role in public engagement, for example Tree Wardens. Historic England also supports the new VETcert scheme, a pan-European certification scheme for veteran tree specialists developed to raise the standard in veteran tree management. In England the scheme is run by the professional body, the Arboricultural Association (<https://trees.org.uk/Training-Events/VETcert>).

Whilst the inclusion of reference to the value of ancient veteran trees in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 175c) was much welcomed, the need for a protective designation for these historic and culturally important trees is still to be fully debated. In 2018 Defra consulted on developing criteria for designating a tree of special historic or cultural significance ([https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/protecting-trees-and-woodlands/supporting\\_documents/TreeswoodlandsconsultdocumentRB.pdf](https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/protecting-trees-and-woodlands/supporting_documents/TreeswoodlandsconsultdocumentRB.pdf)). Just under 70% of respondents supported the criteria, but as the proposed Duty to Consult was to include these trees, the merits of designation to recognise and actively protect these trees was not discussed further. Advocates include the Tree Council, whose Green Monuments Campaign presses for proper safeguards for heritage trees and for them to be designated as 'green monuments'.