

Address from the Forestry Commission, Great Britain, UK

Good afternoon. It's tremendous to be here today, and I really regret, having had a brief sampler, not having been here for the whole conference. I realise that for you, having had the better part of a day and a half, there's nothing new I can say, with the spectacular line-up that Dr Mark Johnston and his team have put together and that Allison has capably run.

The first thing I wanted to say is that none of this, in a way, is new. Here we are on a campus that was designed well over a hundred years ago. People were thinking about greenspace then. People were putting in parks and worrying about the importance of providing greenspace for urban communities. They were working out in days when things were more transport-poor how people could get to trees and see trees and be part of that environment. They understood emotionally the importance of all the psychological issues that we've been talking about.

We are in a continuum, something that's historically important, but I think it lost its way. I think that one of the really interesting things is that we're talking about impact in a scientific language, like the economic language that drives policy-making today. It's really exciting the extent to which we're starting to engage with that. We live in a crowded island in the UK. Here, 80 per cent of the population, I saw on Heather's (Dr Rumble) slide, live in urban areas. So for 80 per cent of us, our main interaction with trees is in the urban forest – parks and woodlands and trees in the city.

This agenda is deeply important to society. Everybody here is converted I think. There's not a person here who would say that trees in the urban environment are not important. But we've got a privileged insight. We are facing quite a sea of sceptics about the economic value of forestry and arboriculture in urban areas, and that's especially true at the moment when local and national governments are pinched for cash. So we have to work doubly hard to demonstrate the value of urban trees. That's why i-Tree is particularly exciting just at the moment. It's great to have heard from Heather, and to have heard all the references to i-Tree and the opportunities that it creates to quantify the value of trees in urban areas.

This summer – I'm very excited – I've volunteered already for i-Tree, and I would suggest that anybody who wants to should volunteer in the huge effort to measure the value of the urban forest in London. Come and join in.

We have a government that has made a policy statement that says that it believes in this marvellous new-fangled term 'ecosystem accounting', which is exactly what i-Tree, and a lot of people here, have been talking about; quantifying the real value of trees. It's great, because trees actually do even more than the services i-Tree quantifies, such as absorbing pollution and carbon. There is a greater value – and that was being talked about by Kathleen (Dr Wolf) – in that there are psychological benefits from being in tree'd environments.

It's a good start for government to start to talk about the concept of a woodland culture; a culture in which people understand the benefits they gain from trees and woodland. The government, has bought into it; certainly in England, with the Big Tree Plant planting a million trees, mostly in deprived areas, and in Scotland,

Sir Harry Studholme¹

¹ Chairman, Forestry Commission, Great Britain, UK

where 1,400 acres of new urban woodland have been created and where 11,000 acres of urban woodland have been brought into management, providing access for local people.

Whatever we do, our urban forest needs to be safe and it needs to be resilient. So talking about this economic value is part of driving the opportunity for funding to ensure that safety and resilience.

One of the top priorities for the Forestry Commission is plant health. The changes in climate and globalisation have exacerbated movement of disease. Pests and diseases do not respect boundaries. I was very struck by the devastation of the emerald ash borer. We've fought a few other things, and we're fighting our own ash dieback problem at the moment. This has raised awareness of trees in the Prime Minister's mind, which has been good, despite the awful destruction of ash. We have responded very effectively to oak processionary moth in London. There's a long way to go, but in one year we managed to produce a 53 per cent reduction in nest numbers, which I think is quite extraordinary.

We have achieved that not by anyone working alone, but by a whole group, a team of groups, working together. One of the aspects of the urban forest is that it's more complex than the forest in rural areas. In rural areas, forests tend to be owned by one individual, and the relationships with communities tend to be much simpler than they are in urban areas. Rural areas are complicated enough though, I can assure you; it's not simple dealing with forestry, trees and arboriculture in a rural environment. The urban environment is special because of the importance of relationships within communities.

The message that I would want to end with, is that the language of trees is international. On a small level, I hope it communicates in this country between England and Scotland, and Wales and Northern Ireland and further to our European neighbours, but also more widely, it runs to the United States and Australasia and China and beyond. It's an international language. It's that sense of community driving action and the ability to do things in urban areas, in urban forestry, which is the most important message that we can take from this conference. Thank you.