

Forestry Sector Response to the England Tree Strategy Consultation



Our three organisations collectively represent the majority of the forestry sector. We welcome the chance to engage with the England Tree Strategy and are committed to working with DEFRA on its design and delivery. Together we can pull together the evidence, convene experts from our diverse and experienced membership and channel good practice.

We have distilled the key collective messages from our separate responses into this: the top six priorities from the forestry sector's representative bodies.

1. Have a clear focus

In order to achieve the scale of change needed, the strategy must have a clear focus. Multiple objectives make it difficult to identify and develop the best delivery mechanisms. We need to leave behind the false dichotomy of productive forestry vs biodiversity. The strategy also needs the political will and cross-government support to drive it forward and give it read-across to green recovery and other schemes like Environmental Land Management.

2. Develop effective delivery mechanisms

The current system of financial incentives and associated bureaucracy is a major barrier and needs to be overhauled. The bottom line is that woodland creation and management need to be commercially viable for the landowner, with long-term guarantees. By creating markets for ecosystem services, trees and woodlands can deliver on all the strategy's objectives.

3. Work from a solid evidence base

The final strategy including all delivery mechanisms and targets must be based on the best available evidence. It needs to take into account what has worked and what has not worked in the past, including where a good approach has been undermined by not having the right mechanisms and funding in place. Research and innovation must take a central role in the strategy, and the sector is ready to support this.

4. Boost sector skills

The strategy needs a major push on skills and careers in forestry. There are already gaps across the board and professional capacity must match the scale of ambition. Government should look to the work of the Forestry Skills Forum to attract more people to the sector and boost existing skills and standards, including in the agricultural sector.

5. Support management not just creation

To meet the climate and nature crises, the strategy must achieve a huge step-up in getting existing woodlands under active, sustainable management – not focus too much on woodland creation. There is great potential in existing woodlands to be harnessed.

6. Embed UKFS

The UK Forestry Standard is the gold standard and a huge asset for delivering on the government's ambitions. It needs to be enshrined in the design and delivery of the strategy and all types of woodland that comply with UKFS must be supported.

We intend this document as a constructive starting point for further discussions. By working together we can ensure that we have an England Tree Strategy that delivers for climate, nature, people and the economy.