

## England Tree Strategy Consultation Response

A new tree strategy for England is an immense and exciting opportunity. There is much working in its favour: public awareness of climate change, EU Exit, land prices, farmers diversifying, political appetite and the push towards public money for public goods. However the stakes are high: we are forced to recognise the urgency of the climate and nature crises more than ever. A flourishing forestry and arboriculture sector will be critical to the green economic recovery. Trees and woodlands are essential strategic assets in our transition to sustainable places, businesses and communities. In order to succeed we must be ambitious.

We welcome the recognition of the multiple benefits that trees and woodlands provide and strongly support the open, inclusive and pragmatic approach to the strategy. If the political commitment and the right expertise are there, it will succeed. This is the chance to set out the **strategic direction**, the **scope**, the **skills and standards** needed, the **sustainable business** models and the **science** to enable success. The Institute and its members are here to support its development and implementation – wherever partners, conveners and experts are needed. In addition to our questionnaire response, we intend this to be a supportive starting point that expands on the areas we consider to be the most critical for a successful tree strategy.

### Five Key Messages

#### Strategic Direction

The breadth and ambition of the document is excellent. The final strategy will however need a sharper focus, and the political will to drive it forward, if it is to achieve anything near the potential from England's trees that is so well recognised. It must be clearer on its objectives, including carbon sequestration, biodiversity, economic and social benefits, and we must overcome the emerging false dichotomy between productive forestry and biodiversity. The strategy must be long-term, in its planning, engagement, funding and investment in people. Finally it needs to be a cross-government strategy with explicit read-across to other policy developments and departments beyond DEFRA. This way we, stakeholders, partners and the tree sector as a whole can confidently deliver on its ambition.

#### Scope

Achieving the right tree in the right place for the right reasons will require all of the actions identified in the questionnaire and more; different actions are suitable for different purposes and are often location- and scale-specific. The document's main emphasis is on woodland and more detail is needed on individual trees and trees outside woods. Given the scale of the challenges, the strategy will need to be clear about the delivery mechanisms designed to meet them. It will need to draw connections between national, regional, local and site, and develop links with the devolved administrations. The next stage will have to be more granular which will involve working with experts across the sector, and we are eager to support government in this.

#### Skills and Standards

The importance of people needs stronger emphasis as there is already an urgent need for more skilled staff in the forestry and arboriculture workforce. The necessary scale of change must be reflected in professional delivery capacity at all levels and in all settings. There is a skills action plan already in place and we would encourage government to call on the Forestry Skills Forum and its members to inject greater energy into this. It will also be crucial

to maintain standards – the Institute has a role here to ensure high standards of professionalism in forestry and arboriculture through its chartered membership, code of conduct and structured CPD.

## **Sustainable Business**

The critical factor for delivery of the strategy is the development of new sustainable business models that support more woodland creation, tree planting and management of trees and woodlands. This will need to be funded by finance from beyond the public sector – including novel climate finance which shows great promise. We must find ways to make it financially attractive for the landowner, whether the outputs are ecosystem services, timber, renewable energy, improved farming or green infrastructure. If we create a strong marketplace for these, success will follow across all four pillars of the consultation, for woodland creation, management, tree protection, plant health, and supporting the sector to thrive.

## **Science**

The strategy must be evidence-based. It is essential to learn from previous strategies, what has worked and what has not, in England and beyond. This is particularly important for biosecurity and resilience. Some citations and examples are given here but we would urge further engagement. The Institute can be a source of expertise and exemplars of what success looks like. The final strategy will also need quantified commitments and a system of monitoring and reporting based on evidence to measure its success.

## **What the Institute can Offer**

The Institute of Chartered Foresters is the Royal Chartered body for foresters and arboriculturists in the UK. It represents a huge breadth of membership and this diversity and range of expertise is one of its greatest strengths. It has over 1,800 members who practice forestry, arboriculture and related disciplines in the private sector, central and local government, research councils, universities and colleges throughout the UK, rural and urban settings, practical forestry and consultancy, at all scales from the individual tree to vast estates, and in all specialisms including conservation, recreation, wood production and urban planning.

The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession. It provides support to its members, guidance to professionals in other sectors, information to the general public, and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers in the forestry and arboricultural industry.

We have consulted with our members via a range of means including a survey and workshops and our response has been steered by a task and finish group and by ICF Council. Our ambition is to influence policy for the benefit of the profession, the environment and society, through ongoing engagement with members, member representatives, stakeholders, policymakers and the public. We strongly recommend DEFRA engage with us further on the development and implementation of the tree strategy and to convene members from across the sector to gather expertise and evidence.

## **Recommendations for Success**

Here we briefly outline our recommended principles for the strategy and the main barriers and opportunities for meeting them. These come under the five key messages discussed above.

	<b>Principles</b>	<b>Barriers, opportunities and evidence</b>
<b>Strategic direction</b>	<b>Be ambitious</b>	Many actions in the consultation already being taken – chance now to be bold and innovative, go a step beyond current mechanisms. Opportunity to embrace use of technology to meet ambitions. Chance to harness public interest and increase understanding of forestry and its benefits – trees to be seen as green assets, critical elements of public and private infrastructure.
	<b>Be strategic</b>	Involve other departments (BEIS, DfE, Treasury and MHCLG) to make it a government strategy not a DEFRA strategy. Generate political will to remove barriers and meet urgency of crisis. Push for integrated approach to land use in England. Give the strategy read-across to other policy developments, particularly Environmental Land Management, Net Gain, Nature Recovery Networks, productivity and planning.
	<b>Set clear objectives</b>	Be clear on different drivers – carbon, economic, communities, public health, biodiversity – clarity will help weigh the options. Breadth and depth are challenging to achieve in single consultation exercise – sector engagement can help develop detail on delivery mechanisms and more granular action plans.
	<b>Think long-term</b>	Strategy and measures taken need to be long-term to match longevity of trees and woodlands. Give forestry continuity and consistency and give land managers certainty and confidence to meet the challenge. Invest in ongoing management for proper establishment not just planting, including skills and training needed for this <sup>1</sup> . Give biosecurity strong emphasis – existing threats already critical to health and resilience of trees and woodland, impact and scale are significant.
<b>Scope</b>	<b>Develop a delivery plan</b>	Strategy itself should be long-term but have a separate, reportable and renewable delivery plan to detail specifics of implementation. Important role for government agencies in this, linked to monitoring and reporting below. Need to co-create new delivery mechanisms seeking input from range of people rather than develop and enact in isolation.
	<b>Recognise the many benefits of trees</b>	Welcome emphasis in document on the benefits including broader biodiversity not just carbon and timber. Could have more on benefits of individual trees e.g. public health, and more on engaging public and communities.
	<b>Value urban trees and trees outside woods</b>	Document is weighted towards woodland. Opportunity to attribute more value to individual trees in policy and public understanding. Emphasise value of urban trees and trees outside woodland and include arboriculturists at strategic level. Consider legal requirement for all LPAs to have tree strategies embedded in local plans – clear strategies in urban areas would drive how local authority trees are managed. Place requirements on developers to manage trees properly, and mitigate against losses.
	<b>Invest in industry skills and careers</b>	Strategy needs strong emphasis on building professional, skilled, trained workforce to deliver on government's ambitions, given urgent need for more skilled staff. Capitalise on huge knowledge and momentum in work of

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.drcompany.co.uk/latest/review-of-south-west-forest-scheme-20-years-from-planting/>

<b>Skills and standards</b>		<p>Forestry Skills Forum<sup>2</sup>. Promote forestry careers, make it attractive to young people. Forestry and environment studies to become mainstream in school education, capitalise on interest among school leavers. Build on T-levels and degree apprenticeships as opportunity to build capacity of sector and promote diversity in workforce. Opportunity to make links with wider land use community.</p>
	<b>Improve and maintain standards</b>	<p>Professional standards will be ever more important to support all strategic ambitions. Institute has vital role to play in setting high bar and ensuring professionalism through chartership, code of conduct and structured CPD. Government to endorse this badge of excellence and actively encourage chartership. Encourage more of forestry workforce to attain professional credibility by supporting Institute initiatives that open up membership to other parts of sector.</p>
	<b>Embed the UK Forestry Standard</b>	<p>Emphasise importance of UKFS and the three Rs – incorporate it fully as the authoritative, common standard and a great asset for the sector<sup>3</sup>. Plant for the future – relying on UKFS and professionalism. Give due reference to UKWAS and other certification schemes as tools for UKFS delivery, especially given aim to promote certification across UK.</p>
<b>Sustainable business</b>	<b>Make it pay</b>	<p>Trees and woodland have to be commercially attractive to land owners/managers, both for creation and management. This is a chance to incentivise better, to broaden and clearly define commercial forestry. Increase the economic viability of land use change and management, considering production, trade and tax. Strategy will achieve more with carrot than stick approach. New funding and incentives across the board for green assets and develop markets like the carbon market. Remove regulatory and administrative barriers e.g. requirement to replant and bureaucracy around applications.<sup>4</sup> Funding landscape must be joined up. Trees must be properly integrated in the Environmental Land Management scheme<sup>5</sup>. Incentivise people to invest in green infrastructure and see trees as green assets.</p>
	<b>Increase resourcing of public bodies</b>	<p>Forestry Commission is the pivotal government agent in this work. It needs appropriate capacity and resource to work with private land owners, local partnerships and local authorities, and deal with applications. Significant role of Forest Research not recognised in document. Local Authorities need more resources to manage estate with skilled staff, particularly Tree Officers.</p>
	<b>Work in partnership</b>	<p>Barrier in competition with agriculture – too much divide between sectors. Engage more with and train farmers e.g. free visit/advice for every farm. Genuine opportunity to make links with wider land use community and get forestry into the mind-set of other land use sectors. Expansion of Community Forests can help bring together new partnerships.</p>
	<b>Support the markets</b>	<p>Promote environmental and other benefits of using home-grown (biosecure) timber and wood products.</p>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rfs.org.uk/media/442100/forestry-skills-study-report-for-england-and-wales-2017.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://forestrycommission.blog.gov.uk/2020/07/17/right-tree-right-place-right-reason/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rfs.org.uk/media/710684/woodland-creation-opportunities-and-barriers-020620-embargo-3-june.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.charteredforesters.org/2020/07/forestry-sectors-response-to-elm-scheme-proposals/>

		Commit financial support for nursery sector and mechanisms to help it invest to provide level of tree supply needed, with lead-in time. Support timber markets with better information on timber prices and focus on UK markets for economy and biosecurity.
<b>Science</b>	<b>Base decisions on evidence and set approach to monitoring</b>	Any strategy needs to look at what we have first <sup>6</sup> , including in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Opportunity to learn from past successes e.g. National forest, community forests <sup>7</sup> and planting on farms in Wales. Evidence base could then provide a basis for monitoring. Final strategy needs quantified commitments and system of monitoring and reporting (see delivery plan above), giving political responsibility and accountability across government departments.
	<b>Set proper targets</b>	Mention of targets for trees in Environment Bill is welcome but need stronger commitments before proposed 2022 consultation. Need evidence-based targets for woodland and for trees outside woods, including canopy cover targets in urban areas, in order to judge which measures are needed. Note challenges of maintaining existing trees as well as increasing tree cover. Consider how regional targets could help and a landscape-led approach to planting.

## Conclusions

The Institute is firmly behind the ambitions of this strategy and committed to working with the UK Government and others to meet them. We are not under any illusions – there is a scale factor that cannot be ignored. The pace and level of change required is significant and there are genuine barriers that must be removed. The implications of inactivity would be very damaging and the time to act is now. We believe, however, that much can be achieved with strong political vision, joint effort and the right incentives. It is possible to drive enough of an increase in woodland creation and management to meet those goals as well as safeguarding our urban trees.

At this critical time for forestry and for the environment, the Institute and its members are here as partners, brokers and experts to support the design and delivery of the strategy. Our reach and credibility is unmatched by any other organisation in the sector – getting into the urban forest and joining up forestry and arboriculture, bridging between environmental, social and commercial interests, operating in the public and private sectors, and able to facilitate and convene networks to engender new ways of working.

Our members and those working with trees across the sector are ready to innovate and commit to the scale of activity required. They in turn have links to connections and clients of all kinds and collectively cover an immense proportion of the landscape. There is a vast amount of knowledge and expertise to tap into which can be an incredible resource for DEFRA. We would urge further engagement to capitalise on this wealth of information and experience from across our membership so that together we can meet the ambitions of the England Tree Strategy.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-panel-on-forestry-final-report>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/1693/Community-forest-governance-RER.pdf>