

EFRA Inquiry: Environmental Land Management (ELM) and the agricultural transition

EU Exit offers a unique opportunity to meet the climate and nature crises head on, through policies that genuinely help us achieve net zero, support biodiversity and power the green recovery. In order to realise this opportunity we must support everyone working in land management to make the transition.

The benefits of trees and woodland are now well recognised. We know that our trees, woodlands and green spaces, not least those on our farms, have a vital role to play: in climate change mitigation but also flood alleviation, water quality, soil health, biodiversity, improved air quality, and better physical and mental health. Trees are essential strategic assets in our transition to sustainable places, businesses and communities.

What the Institute can offer

The [Institute of Chartered Foresters](https://www.charteredforesters.org) is the Royal Chartered body for foresters and arboriculturists in the UK. We have 1,900 members who practice forestry, arboriculture and related disciplines in the private sector, central and local government, research councils and universities and colleges throughout the UK, with many advising farmers and land managers.

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. Chartered foresters, working with farmers across the country, are already demonstrably helping to improve delivery of society's goals, and we want to do more.

The Institute has been actively engaged with Defra on ELM since we published a position paper in 2019, shaped by a group of practitioners and stakeholders. We are represented on Defra's ELM Engagement Group and ELM Advice Satellite Group. In 2020 we reconvened the cross-sector forestry group to discuss emerging policy and advise Defra in a dedicated meeting on trees and woodlands in ELM. We compiled that evidence and expert advice into our response to Defra's policy discussion document last July¹. We have since been working with the Defra forestry policy team on the skills agenda for the England Tree Planting Programme (ETPP) and the rest of the England Tree Strategy work.

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. The Institute is committed to working with government in the design and implementation of a successful approach to land management, supporting a flourishing sector that delivers for climate, nature, people and economy.

Recommendations

Below are the five areas where we strongly recommend close attention for the continued development of agricultural transition policy, aligned with the inquiry questions.

¹ <https://www.charteredforesters.org/2020/07/forestry-sectors-response-to-elm-scheme-proposals/>

Skills (question 5)

There is need of a huge increase in the forestry and arboriculture workforce to meet government objectives^{2,3} but just as important at this is urgent upskilling of farmers, land managers and their advisers, including across related professions, to help them realise the benefits of their land. This is a significant opportunity to integrate forestry and agriculture as complementary rather than competing land uses, which is vital if England is to achieve its climate, biodiversity and green recovery ambitions.

Planting millions of trees is no guarantee of success – it must be the right tree in the right place, properly established and managed not just planted and left. This is the case whether for biodiversity, flood mitigation, other ecosystem services or increased farm income from leisure and tourism. There are significant risks of going ahead without the right people with the right skills – to businesses, professions and the environment. Knowledge of the UK Forestry Standard is crucial and access to a comprehensive, high quality training programme is needed⁴.

Advice (questions 3, 4, 5 and 6)

Similarly, sound advice and support in agricultural transition and ELM will be vital, alongside well designed financial support and regulation. We need farmers to be able to capitalise on the benefits trees and woodland can offer their businesses⁵. The move away from some current practices will require cultural change and many land managers will need practical support to transition⁶. A financial incentive in itself is not enough – good technical and business support is needed through the process. Ongoing advice and support for scheme applicants through delivery phases generates more successful outcomes⁷.

ELM would also benefit from more integrated advice where forestry, conservation etc. are all given a voice. Forestry advice also needs to be integrated within the farming community to give it greater recognition (most farms have woods but many farm advisers have little knowledge of the potential of trees on farms) and to help consider the whole holding. Finally, with the push towards a market-based model for advice there is a risk that the proactive role of the modern regulator is reduced to simple compliance monitoring and enforcement, with too much responsibility resting solely on private sector advisers.

Engagement (questions 3 and 4)

Engagement and communications from Defra need to be inclusive of forestry and promote all the benefits that trees and woodland options will bring to farm businesses, like flood management. There needs to be better awareness raising and training for woodland creation and agroforestry, presented as an opportunity for farmers to diversify and build more resilient business models. The Future Farming and Countryside Programme, arguably where the cultural and technological changes will be driven, is not drawing in the expertise it needs – it

² <https://www.charteredforesters.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ICF-Response-to-England-Tree-Strategy-Consultation.pdf>

³ <https://www.rfs.org.uk/media/442100/forestry-skills-study-report-for-england-and-wales-2017.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.charteredforesters.org/2020/07/forestry-sectors-response-to-elm-scheme-proposals/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-transition-plan-2021-to-2024>

⁶ <https://www.rfs.org.uk/media/710684/woodland-creation-opportunities-and-barriers-020620-embargo-3-june.pdf>

⁷ <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/elm/elmpolicyconsultation/>

must have tree and woodland representation. We want to help government achieve its targets for Net Zero and tree planting and achieve a strong uptake for ELM.

One of the gains of a move to ELM is the chance to inspire the land-based sector to shared commitment, pragmatism and innovation in achieving the broad spectrum environmental change described in the 25 Year Environment Plan⁸. Through transition, the partnership between the farming and forestry community needs to create a shared ambition, where practical know-how from those on the ground is matched with technical and business support from professional advisors and statutory agencies.

Coherence (questions 3, 4 and 5)

The link between ELM and the Nature for Climate Fund needs to be explicit to encourage uptake – at both a strategic and a practical level. The different financial support mechanisms will need to dovetail and for the sake of transition we need clarity now on how they will work. The current system does not deliver the benefits government is committed to. Transition is the opportunity to step back and review the whole approach. A clean break from current options should be permitted, without penalty and with the minimum of bureaucracy. Verbal assurance from ministers that no one will be disadvantaged for planting trees now is not enough – few advisers would encourage a land owner to plant before the support package is guaranteed.

Links also need to be clear with other strategic priorities such as tree health, productivity and nature recovery. Departments and teams must work together closely so schemes work together seamlessly. There is a risk of competing priorities between, for example, the ETPP and ELM, when in fact they should be delivery mechanisms and enablers for each other. This will become even more important as the detail is hammered out.

Funding (questions 4 and 5)

Steady, realistic and long-term funding is crucial to the success of ELM. As we stated in our response to the England Tree Strategy consultation⁹, the development of new sustainable business models is crucial, including funding from natural capital and environmental services through current and new markets. These markets will need the government to help bring them about, such as offsetting of pollution and biodiversity loss and promotion of timber as a lower impact product. However, there are also important societal needs that markets will not adequately address. Government needs to be prepared, through initiatives such as ELM, to be the market, to give confidence for investment and to buy what is needed in a commercially viable way from the land owning/ managing provider.

Our legacy

This is the most important land management change in half a century. It's vital that we capitalise on this opportunity to get it right for the environment as well as for all land managers and their businesses.

The Institute and the forestry sector are key partners in this and we welcome further engagement with the Committee and with Defra.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

⁹ <https://www.charteredforesters.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ICF-Response-to-England-Tree-Strategy-Consultation.pdf>