



English Tree Strategy – A consultation.

This briefing is provided to all APSE member authorities but will be of particular interest to those officers responsible for parks and open spaces, arboricultural services and climate change.

Key Issues:

- This consultation will inform an England Tree Strategy. The strategy will set out policy priorities to deliver Defra's ambitious tree planting programme.
- The strategy will focus on expanding, protecting and improving England's woodlands, and how trees and woodlands can connect people to nature, support the economy, combat climate change and recover biodiversity.
- The strategy aims to ensure that trees are established and managed for the many benefits they provide for people, the economy, the climate and nature itself.
- Defra are therefore seeking views on how England can significantly increase tree establishment and woodland creation to support nature recovery, clean growth and the commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- Views are also sought on how England can protect existing trees and woodland, bring more woodlands into management, use them to support the economy, and engage more people with trees and woodlands.

Background

England's trees and woodland are a key part our natural history, cultural heritage and are critical to helping provide a resilient healthy future. Trees as well as being found in our woodlands, both recent and ancient, can be found in hedges, on farmland, in our parks, and increasingly, our streets. They provide homes for plants and animals and are key to helping to create places where we like to relax. Trees clean our air, help manage our water, provide wood products and as aesthetically pleasing features of both our urban and rural

landscapes and more importantly expand access to the benefits we can gain from contact with nature.

More recently trees and woodland are being seen as being critical to help support our national commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

Scotland has delivered the vast majority of woodland creation for the UK in recent years, and therefore Government's commitment to increase planting across the UK means that England has to do much more.

To gain the full benefits trees provide will require establishing trees across the country in all settings and through a range of approaches. However, in planting trees we must ensure we encourage the right tree in the right place, this includes planting in urban areas, integrating trees and woodlands into farmland, creating large new forests and harnessing the power of natural processes to establish woodlands where appropriate.

Funding for this aim will have to come from both public money and private finance. Government has made major commitments to trees in recent years, kick-starting planting of a Great Northumberland Forest, invested alongside charities in a new Northern Forest stretching from Liverpool to Hull, planted trees in towns and cities with the Urban Tree Challenge Fund and planted one million trees in schools. As well as managing a range of grants for landowners to create and manage woodlands and introduced mechanisms to stimulate private investment, such as the Woodland Carbon Guarantee.

Trees and carbon reduction targets

Government's commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 will require a multitude of different initiatives, one being the increased planting of trees, as trees currently capture 4% of current UK emissions, then increasing this carbon store will be a key step on the path to net zero emissions.

In its manifesto to help meet its net zero target, Government has made a commitment to increase tree planting across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by 2025, in line with the annual rate recommended by the Committee on Climate Change in 2019.

However, carbon capture is just one of the multiple benefits of planting trees. In order to leave the environment in a better state for future generations, the 25 Year Environment Plan, published by Defra, is taking a coordinated natural capital approach, investing £640 million through a Nature for Climate Fund, and aligning the Government's strategies for nature, trees, peat, floods, and agriculture

The £640m Nature for Climate Fund announced in the March 2020 budget provides significant funding for tree planting, and will be spent on the basis of paying public money for public goods.

Part of England's national response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies is reliant on land owners and managers choosing to plant and manage the right trees and woodland. Defra hope farmers, land managers and the owners of all types of land, **including local authorities** and especially those who have not considered woodland creation and management in the past, will respond. It is hoped that planting will increase year on year, as new programmes and partnerships are set up, which join government, communities, businesses, landowners and managers to plant available land, and create a sustainable pipeline of woodland creation projects for future years.

Therefore, Defra is developing the English Tree Strategy as part of a fresh domestic approach to land management across England's landscapes. This consultation <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/england-tree-strategy/> has been developed in parallel with other environmental strategies flowing from the 25 Year Environment Plan, including the recent Tree Health Resilience Strategy, and the forthcoming Nature Strategy and England Peat Strategy. Integrating these should enable sustainable change at landscape-scale and collective delivery of the 25 Year Environment Plan goal of improving the environment within a generation.

The Strategy consultation looks at a variety of issues promoting the increased planting of trees and the benefits they bring, including:

- **The need to expand and connect our trees and woodland**

Most new woodlands are currently created on private land, so expansion relies on the establishment of trees being an attractive option for landowners. **Increased planting on public land** will also make an important contribution to delivering targets for tree and woodland expansion, therefore Government will be interested to hear from local authorities as to how they can help with tree planting targets

- **The role of tree planting in creating spaces for nature**

Trees and woodlands provide space for nature and are vital for conservation by having an important role in buffering and connecting habitats whilst also providing essential corridors and providing food and sanctuary for a range of species. Existing and new trees and woodlands may therefore contribute to the Nature Recovery Network (NRN). As well as restoring the protected sites at its core, the NRN aims to create or restore an additional 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat to support a coherent, national ecological network. This is a goal in the 25 Year Environment Plan which will be supported by a Nature Recovery Fund investment of up to £25 million. This Fund will bring together businesses, landowners **including local authorities** and their communities to protect and restore habitats, species and landscapes to allow nature to thrive everywhere.

The Environment Bill is creating a new system of spatial strategies for nature called Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). These could be an important new tool for identifying

suitable locations for tree planting. LNRS will create a compulsory requirement for **responsible authorities** to map the most valuable existing habitat for nature, set out proposals for creating or improving habitat and agree priorities for nature's recovery. These priorities will include consideration of the role that nature-based solutions can play in addressing wider environmental issues such as carbon sequestration for climate mitigation and tree planting will have a key role in these strategies.

- **Increasing national tree coverage to create landscape level change**

Increasing tree and woodland cover at the scale required by net zero, and our international and domestic commitments to recover biodiversity, will require woodland restoration and creation that will result in changes to our landscapes. The benefits of creating new woodlands and the management of existing woodland will need to be understood and planned for at a landscape scale, which will require collective effort to encourage widespread interest and support for woodland creation across land owners, business and the local communities that will see the change. Defra believes part of the approach to this should be to bring together the energies of local communities, local government, businesses, farmers, other land managers and investors in empowered and informed local partnerships. These partnerships could decide local priorities for woodland creation by identifying the best places to plant the right trees and provide access for people as well as other benefits.

Around urban areas these partnerships might consider the potential for more trees and woodland on greenbelt land which provides opportunity for wider public access to woodlands closer to where people live. By empowering local communities through this process, Government hopes to generate local support for, and where possible participation, in afforestation at a new scale.

- **The need to engage people with trees and woodland**

Trees should benefit everyone's daily lives - wherever we live. In the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan it is stated that the provision of more and higher quality green infrastructure - including urban and suburban trees - will make towns and cities attractive places to live and work, and bring about key long-term improvements in people's health. As part of this, the Government's manifesto sets an ambition to see all new streets lined with trees, and wants to see more trees planted in urban and suburban areas overall. This urban forest – all the trees in urban areas, in public and private spaces – is a key part of future green infrastructures which collectively provides services for us such as cooling the air and providing shade, improving our health and wellbeing and making more attractive places for us to live, travel and work. Evidence shows that these benefits can also lead to wider economic gains, for example reducing costs associated with flood damage and potential increases in the values of properties. The urban forest also improves biodiversity by creating habitats and urban tree planting and will be an important tool for ensuring the Nature Recovery Network reaches into towns and cities.

Greening the urban landscape is also a critical part of climate change adaptation through managing increasing risks from over-heating and surface water flooding. Tree canopy cover in England is currently 16% on average in urban areas, but this varies greatly between and within towns and cities. To help address this, we need to find ways to better value, plant, and protect trees. We also need to find ways to address the cost and funding challenges of planting and maintaining urban trees and ensure appropriate guidance enables there to be enough space for trees. We need to see them as a key feature in towns and cities with equal status to green and other built infrastructure.

- **Increasing the number of street trees**

Street trees are a key component of the urban forest and critical in delivering its services. The government therefore set out a commitment that all new streets should be lined with trees. The planting and longevity of street trees requires appropriate skills and resources, from early planning, through effective planting and maintenance. The report by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission on how to promote and increase the use of high-quality design for new build homes and neighbourhoods includes recommendations to plant more street trees, create urban orchards and plant fruit trees for homes. The strategy wants to ensure that government, communities and businesses can come together to see how these can be delivered.

Furthermore, urban trees provide immediate benefits to those living and working nearby, and given the varying potential for tree planting between local areas, Government believes that leadership to increase tree cover is **best taken at the local level**. Tree and Woodland Strategies produced by some local authorities demonstrate that local authorities value trees as green assets. Production of these by more Local Authorities could then be used to engage communities and businesses in common action to achieve their ambitions.

Mandatory biodiversity net gain, proposed in the Environment Bill, will also help to ensure that developers can demonstrate the biodiversity benefit of trees and woodland delivered through their developments. It is widely acknowledged that trees need care and maintenance to become established and that their different benefits will be maximised at different points in time. Therefore, the approach to implement net gain, in all its forms, must recognise this to help trees secure the funding they require. Contributions from development may help to fund the provision and maintenance of trees in urban areas, provided it is balanced alongside the need to fund other infrastructure requirements and maintains the viability of development projects.

- **Creating woodlands in and around towns and cities**

England's existing network of Community Forests are located in and around towns and cities. They bring together **local authorities**, planners, business and charities to plant trees in places of greatest public need, using brownfield, green belt, derelict and reclaimed land. Defra believes that new funding for community forests will help to create woodlands for people - for our enjoyment, education and recreation - close to where many of us live. There is also growing interest from other community groups and social enterprises to take on the creation of new woodlands, as well as the ownership and management of existing woodlands. Defra wants to support existing and new Community Forests to create even more new woodlands and to facilitate increased access to existing woodlands, by supporting local land owners. This may enable new corridors of woodland along water courses for the benefit and amenity of local people and wildlife.

APSE Comment

People feel strongly about woodlands, seeing them as great places to be active, or relax, and explore, and learn about the natural world. The 25 Year Environment Plan therefore seeks to connect people with the natural environment, and has programmes in place to improve health and well-being and encourage children to be closer to nature.

The recent pandemic has shown that engagement with nature has never been higher with Government relying heavily on the value of greenspaces in maintaining public health and well-being.

Whilst APSE welcomes the proposed Tree Strategy for England, it has to be recognised that when planning for new trees and woodlands, we must be sensitive to existing features and habitats, ensuring the condition of priority habitats, such as peatland are not compromised.

The Natural Capital Committee recently pointed out the potential for tree planting on deep peat could in fact lead to increases in carbon emissions, as tree planting in some areas particularly bogs and wetlands could compromise the hydrology of these sites leading to them drying out and releasing centuries of stored carbon into the atmosphere.

APSE hopes that the strategy will consider the need to balance tree planting with resilience and biodiversity gains rather than simply meeting planting targets.

In relation to woodland and tree management, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the 'active' management of these once features once established, as currently it is estimated only 59% of the woodlands we have are actively managed and only 9% of these are in a favourable condition (National Forest Inventory survey).

Certainly, stronger legislation which protects trees and woodlands and the availability of sufficient funding will go a long way to ensuring the future sustainability of our trees and woodlands and it is hoped this will be a key feature of the future strategy.

APSE therefore recommends that local authority officers and elected members who have a responsibility for green infrastructure and climate change take the opportunity to consider the strategy's proposals and responds to them thus ensuring the eventual targets and recommendations are practical and deliverable.

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