

Briefing on England Tree Strategy

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), alongside the Forestry Commission, have now set out a proposal for an England Tree Strategy, **which is open for consultation until the 11th September**. This is part of a body of work being done by the Department on forestry, and ties in with the £640 million Nature for Climate Fund (a commitment of the Conservative 2019 Manifesto), as well as the proposed Environment Land Management scheme (ELMs). It is also expected that further strategies including the England Peat Strategy and Nature Strategy will follow this.

The Strategy aims to set out a path to:

- **Planting 30,000 hectares of tree planting per year by 2025.** This move brings it in line with the Committee on Climate Change advice, which suggests increasing to 50,000 hectares per year by 2050 to reach net zero emissions.

Energy

*“Energy forestry uses fast-growing trees which are planted and specially grown on a short rotation to provide biomass for power generation. **This has an important role as we green the UK’s electricity and heat systems, moving away from fossil fuels**”.*

The policy document also outlines that biomass is desirable because “unlike burning fossil fuels which simply release carbon into the atmosphere, biomass is a renewable resource which takes carbon back out of the atmosphere through photosynthesis as the plants regrow”.

They do however stress the need for this biomass to be produced in a sustainable way, and speak of the value of the Biomass Suppliers’ List (BSL) and other schemes that certify sustainable forest management.

A further opportunity and benefit they add, is to farmers looking to diversify their business and the role that short-rotation forestry (SRF) and short-rotation coppice (SRC) can play. They go further to say that current policy designed to permanently preserve woodland cover, which is supported through the regulatory system is a “potential blocker which discourages farmers from trying SRF and SRC. **They are open to amending this, to allow a more flexible system where land use can change.**

The consultation aims to remove some of these barriers, with the following questions of relevance:

1. **How could the policy about the permanence of woodlands better support tree establishment for agro forestry or energy crops? (select one option)**
 - a. Changing policy so it does not treat afforestation as a permanent land use change
 - b. Adjusting policy so energy forestry crops (short rotation coppice and short rotation forestry) are not permanent land use change
 - c. Retaining the current position whereby afforestation is generally a permanent land use change
2. **Which actions would best increase the uptake of energy forestry? (select up to two options)**
 - a. Providing financial support for the capital costs of energy forestry
 - b. Clarifying the taxation of energy forestry (as either agriculture or forestry)
 - c. Clarifying the regulatory position for energy forestry (for example, can I change land use in the future)
 - d. Providing support to develop a secure supply chain (such as forward contracts for feedstock)

- e. Providing better advice and guidance on energy forestry f) Increasing skills capacity in energy forestry
- f. Other - please specify in no more than 25 words.

Market, Supply Chains and Workforce

There is of course the challenge of growing this market and ensuring it does not reach supply issues, or struggle to grow based on a lack of skilled workers. One problem highlighted is the size of most UK forest holdings, with 92% being less than ten hectares in size, making cost effectiveness a challenge.

To help address this, they want to look at options to increase supply chains through increased productivity, collaboration, and co-operatives. This could include helping land managers to work together to access the machinery and skills to manage their woodlands, and to obtain certificates such as Grown in Britain.

In order to address skills shortages, they want to expand the work of the Forestry Skills Forum and mention the 'Professional Forester' degree-level apprenticeship – which is currently being developed by the Forestry Commission, the Institute for Charter Foresters and the Trailblazer Group.

Relevant consultation questions:

1. Which actions would best increase agroforestry, woodland creation and management on tenanted farmland? (select up to two options)

- a. Providing industry led guidance, best practice and case studies of how tenants and landlords can work together to deliver benefits for both parties from diversification into tree planting and agroforestry on tenanted land
- b. Providing eligibility criteria for tree establishment grant agreements to discourage the proactive resumption of tenanted farmland
- c. Reviewing how tenancy agreements approach the responsibility for and rights to trees
- d. Confirming the property rights to long-term carbon benefits
- e. Other - please specify in no more than 25 words

2. What are the most urgent shortages in the workforce capacity needed to increase woodland creation, maintenance and management? (select up to two options)

- a. Professional forester
- b. Supervisor for forest works
- c. Machine operator, for example, tractor/harvester/forwarder drivers
- d. Hand cutter / chainsaw operator
- e. Tree planter
- f. Tree nursery workers
- g. Forestry educators
- h. Land agents, surveyors and architects with specialist forest knowledge
- i. All of the above
- j. Other - please specify in no more than 25 words

3. Which actions would best strengthen productivity in forestry supply chains? (select up to three options)

- a. Providing grant support for wider range of management options

- b. Providing support for woodland infrastructure such as roading
- c. Providing grant or loans for equipment (for example, harvesters)
- d. Providing support for productivity/supply chains for woodland products
- e. Providing better information on market prices and opportunities
- f. Training to increase the skills capacity in agricultural workers
- g. Facilitating collaborative working between woodland owners
- h. Developing options for private investment for ecosystem services that drive woodland management
- i. Other - please specify in no more than 25 words