

Association of Tree Officers response to the Call for evidence for Parliamentary Committee on tree planting

1) Are the UK Government's targets for increasing forestry coverage, and tree planting, for England and the UK sufficiently ambitious and realistic?

RESPONSE:

The Association of tree Officers (ATO) and its members do not in generally cover forestry, therefore we are unable to comment on forestry targets.

ATO members are mainly concerned with urban trees and woodlands and there appears to be no targets for urban tree planting.

2) Are the right structures in place to ensure that the UK wide target for increasing forestry coverage is delivered?

RESPONSE:

Tree & woodland officer are responsible for trees in the built environment, and tree officer numbers have been significantly reduced during the local government austerity years imposed by central government since 2008. Therefore, a depleted tree officer resource is not in a good position to respond to increased tree planting targets. The risk is with a poor UK wide tree officer resource, the various stages of the tree planting process are undermined from the start. Let alone the long-term maintenance of the trees to ensure that the ecosystem services are achieved. ("A healthy tree population requires a health tree officer population".)

Tree planting in the urban environment is a lengthy process with planning and implementation requiring some 18 months to 2 years, taking into account site investigations, tree selection, tree purchasing, work force management and the long term financial management of the tree planting and aftercare.

3) How effective is the co-ordination between the four nations on forestry issues, including biosecurity, plant health and other cross-border issues?

RESPONSE:

As noted above ATO is concerned with the urban forest, therefore we feel unable to comment on this point.

However, in terms of the urban forest, it is felt that there is good connectivity between the local authorities across the UK with national professional organisations like ATO promoting best practice.

4) Why were previous ambitions for increasing tree planting in England not met and what lessons should be learned?

RESPONSE:

In terms of the urban forest, there is a lack of understanding concerning the difficulties posed when planting in the urban environment. There is limited available land to plant trees, and locating sites is time consuming in terms of:

- Surveying for planting sites avoiding conflict with over and underground utility services
- Consultation with local residents
- Internal liaison with various council departments to plant trees on their land and the related financial implications i.e. establishment aftercare and long-term tree

maintenance

The supply of trees from tree nurseries is also a factor, in that first and foremost the 'right tree for the right site' should be the main consideration in the tree planting selection process. However, if the tree nursery industry has not been given sufficient time (6 to 7 years) to increase their stock availability, tree managers are left with a limited species choice. With nurseries buying in non-UK planting stock there is an increased biosecurity risk to feed the demand.

Due to the lack of tree establishment funding following the 1973 Government-Sponsored National Campaign, aimed at encouraging tree planting in the 'National Tree Planting Year', the failure of newly planted trees was high. Following the campaign, the saying that was widely used in the arboricultural profession at the time was - "Plant a tree in 73, plant another in 74 and watch them die in 75". There is no point in planting large numbers of trees without the financial provision for aftercare to avoid high mortality rates.

5) In relation to increasing forestry coverage in England, what should the Government be trying to achieve? For example, how should the following policy objectives be prioritised?

- Mitigating or adapting to climate change
- Promoting biodiversity and nature recovery;
- Increasing biosecurity and plant health;
- Improving human well-being and health;
- Protecting natural and cultural heritage;
- Food security;
- Creating commercial opportunities from forestry, tourism and recreation; and
- Any other priorities?

RESPONSE:

All the above are important factors, but they are not relevant unless tree planting is sustainable, and the trees remain healthy and reach maturity. Priorities:

- Increasing biosecurity and plant health
- Promoting biodiversity and nature recovery
- Food security
- Mitigating or adapting to climate change
- Improving human well-being and health
- Protecting natural and cultural heritage
- Creating commercial opportunities from forestry, tourism and recreation

Under any other priorities we would add educating the wider public about the importance of woodlands and individual trees.

6) Are the right policies and funding in place to appropriately protect and manage existing woodlands in England? How will prospective changes to policy and legislation effect this?

RESPONSE:

Locally the right policies are generally in place, but possibly not nationally. The lack of budgets to manage woodlands is a problem for local authorities.