

FORESTRY & TIMBER NEWS

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PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

POLICY CONFERENCE 2024

A YEAR IN REVIEW





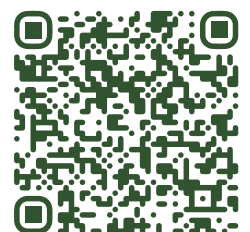
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Give us confidence to continue



STUART GOODALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
CONFOR

For some time now two words keep coming to mind – frustration and confidence.

It often feels that to be in forestry is to feel frustration. For example, we could deliver so much of what society needs and governments say they want, but governments aren't providing the environment for success.

The climate emergency is a case in point. The effects of a changing climate appear on our television screens with disturbing frequency, so surely we need to deploy every response we can? However, government policies often remove productive forests and their carbon about as quick as we can establish new forests. And while using home-grown wood in housing and construction will both lock up carbon and displace high-carbon materials like brick and concrete, governments have appeared to shy away from backing timber.

Some progress has been made, with levels of woodland creation in England and Scotland higher than before the climate emergency was called, and UK forestry minister Mary Creagh is backing the Timber in Construction Roadmap. However, continued under-funding of woodland creation in Scotland and under-performance in Wales do not engender confidence.

And confidence is key, whether that is to develop new woodland creation projects or to invest in the people and kit required to grow the trees, and to plan, plant and protect them.

The changes to Business Property Relief add to the uncertainty and will impact on a number of those who own woodland. Confor will be consulting with members on next steps in the new year.

We will also be pushing for publication of the stalled deer and squirrel strategy that the previous government prepared. Without that we will simply not unlock the valuable role our broadleaved woodland can play and bequeath to future generations a high-quality hardwood resource.

In a highly regulated sector, where public policy and grants are so influential, it is in governments' own interest to do more to recognise the need for longer-term certainty and to provide a clearer signal that they understand and support the industry.

In 2025, a forestry minister's resolution should be to ask what industry thinks and challenge us to come up with solutions, and above all aim to inspire the enduring confidence we need to deliver the wide range of benefits we know we can; from carbon to economic growth to places for people and wildlife.

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CONDITIONS ARE “JUST RIGHT” FOR FORESTRY AND TIMBER IN THE UK

The industry is in a “Goldilocks moment” where conditions are just right to align industry aspirations with UK Government policies, Confor’s annual Westminster conference heard.
Reporting by **David Lee**.

Addressing the largest number of delegates yet to attend the annual Confor policy conference at the QEII Centre, Westminster, Chief Executive Stuart Goodall said industry could deliver a wide range of the Government’s economic, environmental and social priorities - but needed confidence and policy certainty to unlock the potential.

He was optimistic the Labour Government would carry on the positive work of recent Conservative ministers and offer clear political support to forestry and wood. This would manifest itself by partnering on the Timber in Construction Roadmap which “is not a party political issue, just good sense” and the National Wood Strategy for England, as well as secure funding for woodland creation and a stable operating environment.

The big Issue of the built environment

Mary Creagh MP, whose ministerial brief includes forestry, voiced clear support for an increase in productive conifer planting and the use of more home-grown wood in her opening address. She praised the previous government for scaling up planting to 4,500 hectares in England - part of a generational high of just over 20,000 hectares across the UK in 2023-24.

She was keen to see the “useful and important” Timber in Construction Roadmap re-endorsed and “hoped to have good news early in the New Year”, and said she wanted “a healthy, resilient and bountiful natural environment with the productive forestry sector thriving and succeeding”.

She said: “We have a statutory tree and woodland cover target which we are working towards as part of our ambition to reduce carbon emissions by at least 81% by 2035. This is a world-leading and incredibly ambitious target. But we need to not

just plant trees - we need to make good use of the materials they provide us.

“Labour’s commitment to building 1.5 million homes provides an opportunity to grow demand for the safe use of timber in construction, and increasing the safe use of timber in construction in England will help reduce embodied carbon in the built environment and drive investment into tree planting, forest management and domestic supply chains, while also creating new green jobs in every nation and region of the country.

“Only 10% of what we are planting is conifer trees, producing softwood, and we need to get this number higher,” the Minister added, also stressing that the management of broadleaf and mixed woodlands had to improve.

The need to use more timber in construction was a recurring theme, and Paul Brannen - author of ‘Timber! How Wood Can Help Save the World from Climate Breakdown’ - warned the 1.5 million new homes Labour had to be built in a very different way to the last 1.5 million. This meant far greater use of timber, and less steel and concrete, he said.

Mr Brannen described concrete as “the most destructive material in the world” and said it was responsible for 8% of the world’s carbon emissions. The need to use more timber was highly persuasive, he argued, because planting productive forestry and then harvesting and using the wood offered a triple-S benefit: sequestration (of carbon by growing trees), storage (of carbon in wood products) and substitution (of more carbon-intensive materials like concrete and steel).

Mr Brannen was encouraged that Mary Creagh mentioned the importance of embodied carbon in the built environment - and said it needed to be valued and measured to accelerate the use of timber in



Mary Creagh



Skills panel



Paul Brannen



Richard Stanford



Miranda Joicey

All photos: Carolyne Locher

construction.

The potential to build with timber was getting higher (literally) by the year, he said. The world's tallest timber building, in Norway, is 18 storeys and 85.4 metres high, but it was now possible "to build most buildings, in most places, with timber".

Until recently, Mr Brannen said, the most frequently asked question was around fire risk (largely overcome by using fire retardant coatings and/or encapsulating wood in another material), but now the big question was 'Have we got enough sustainable timber?' The answer was complex, he said, but had to involve a strong commitment to planting far more wood-producing forests.

Alex Goodfellow, CEO of Donaldson Offsite, said the housing market was clearly moving towards greater use of wood, but needed further support at Government level.

"We've got a tried and tested sector here," he said. "Give our industry some endorsement, put 'embedded carbon' into building regulations, and let us make it work. Of all homes built in England this year, around 50% have been constructed by businesses who have a timber frame arm of their organisation or are building one.

"The market has already decided [to move onwards to greater use of timber

construction] and is showing the direction of travel."

The Timber in Construction Roadmap would articulate the solution clearly, Mr Goodfellow said, with pledges to improve data used by the industry, to promote the safe and sustainable use of timber in construction, increase skills capacity - and increase the sustainable supply of timber.

He admitted it would be very tough to meet the 1.5 million new homes target, but added: "Even if we can't do it, we can have a bloody good lash at it."

Talking or taking action?

Stuart Goodall emphasised the need for Ministers to work with the industry closely and constructively, and the potential that can come from doing that, with the message that "Ministers Matter".

"We are a very highly regulated industry," he said. "You can't plant a tree or fell a tree without Government approval, and the Government will govern how you manage your woodland through the UKFS. I can't think of another sector where there is so much power over the long-term success of the industry in the hands of ministers and officials."

He highlighted the net loss of conifers under Conservative governments between 2010 and 2024 - around 37,000 hectares

- as a stark example of the "huge impact of government decisions" on the sector, especially when a crucial part of the policy - compensatory planting, had failed to happen. Forestry Commission CEO Richard Stanford used the same statistics on loss of conifers and stressed that while it was vital to protect ancient woodlands and restore open habitats, there must be compensatory planting of conifers alongside this.

Mr Goodall noted that there had been a positive shift in support for the industry in the later years of Conservative rule - bringing some balance back into policy - and called for continuity of that balanced policy to breed industry confidence. "We need strong, clear political support, a stable operating environment and secure funding for woodland creation, and for sustainable management of our existing woodland," he added.

If the government was able to offer this, the forestry and wood sector could offer a huge amount in return, Mr Goodall said. This could include economic growth and jobs, progress to net zero through carbon sequestration and storage (by trees and wood products), as well as low-carbon homes and support for nature recovery.

Richard Stanford agreed the industry *continued on p8*



Timber panel

continued from p7

was well-positioned to support all the Government's main missions, and what it delivered mapped very clearly to all Environment Secretary Steve Reed's five goals - including moving to a zero-carbon economy, supporting nature recovery and reducing flood risks.

At the end of the conference, Confor Chair Lord Duncan said conditions were ripe for the forestry and wood industry to find that alignment with Government objectives. "This is our Goldilocks moment," he said. "Conditions are just right - we are in the right place at the right time and forestry is the answer to so many questions.

"We need to make sure the sector is heard - now - because we need to get it right now, not in 20 or 30 years."

Growing money with trees

Private investment is crucial to unlock the environmental and economic potential of the forestry and wood industry - but barriers are deterring investors. Miranda Joicey, of Gresham House, said forestry was "a proven and effective solution to meet government targets" - but "ambition must be backed up by practical political action."

Importing more than 80% of the wood used in the UK was "unnecessary and unsustainable", she argued, leaving us "hostage to price volatility and geopolitical influence".

Ms Joicey said if government policy and regulation encouraged the release of patient, long-term capital, it could deliver many of its economic and environmental ambitions.

The greatest challenge was a lack of certainty created by a range of factors, she argued - fiscal change, ineffective planting approvals, an ineffective carbon standard and poor public perception of productive forestry. "The cumulative impact creates significant headwinds, and the lack of a

coherent approach deters further investment and risks undermining forestry's contribution to the economy, decarbonisation and biodiversity," she said.

"In the absence of a pragmatic approach, schemes face policy battles on a site-by-site basis." Gresham House's experience was that schemes could take 18 months to 3 years to get approval, which was "unacceptable and unworkable". She called for a clearly-defined and enforced timeframe, alongside a "stronger emphasis on positive messaging to balance the prevailing negative commentary".

Richard Stanford challenged these timeframes, saying major progress had been made in reducing approval times on low-sensitivity land through a new fast-track scheme introduced in April 2024. This pledged to give a decision on applications within 12 weeks and had so far done that in 95% of cases, he said, for an area covering around 300 hectares.

He recognised challenges around high land values, a large number of new Forestry Commission staff who are still gaining experience, and conceded that planting applications outside the low-sensitivity mapped areas could take much longer to determine, usually due to the need for detailed environmental investigations.

But he stressed: "We want to get on the front foot. It's time for timber - we hear a lot about food security, but we need to shout a lot more about timber security. We are in a climate emergency and we are meeting it with business as usual."

He recognised the value of private capital, as the government was in a tight financial position - and said it was crucial to "leverage money from the City". Tom Barnes, Managing Director of Vastern Timber, also highlighted the need to align government policy with private investment.

One year after launching the National Wood Strategy for England at the 2023 Confor policy conference, its lead author said he was disappointed by the lack of progress. "We waited for an election, now we are waiting for engagement," he said. "We need to engage in detailed, sensible conversations about this.

"It's been 22 weeks since the election. We need to urge the government to communicate what its priorities [for forestry and wood] are. The only way we will make progress is to deploy private capital, for the people in this room to buy land and plant trees. But the confidence is lacking without political support."

Igniting industry interest

The forestry industry must shout more loudly on the international stage, and to make its voice heard at global gatherings like the COPs.

That was the clear message from Ross Hampton, Executive Director of the International Sustainable Forestry Coalition (ISFC) - created in 2023 to "bring together a group of the world's leading forestry companies to work collectively to help solve some of the globe's greatest environmental challenges".

Mr Hampton said after his visit to COP29 on climate change in Azerbaijan: "So many of the pavilions were decked out



Ross Hampton

with sustainable forest products - everyone knows it's the future.

"It's time for us to move from just providing the materials for others to have conversations to being centre stage ourselves. At the moment, people can't see the forestry for the trees - and we are not terrifically good at telling our story."

He urged the industry to deliver a more upbeat message and told the forestry students in the room, whose attendance was supported by the Forest Industries Education Fund, that they had chosen their future career well.

Skills was a major topic for discussion at the first meeting of the UK Government's Tree Planting Taskforce in November - the first time ministers from the UK Government and the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had come together in more than a decade to discuss forestry matters.

"We need more young people in forestry training and more providers offering that training, and to address the issues young people have in accessing forestry jobs," Ms Creagh said. "Ensuring sufficient forestry skills is a UK-wide challenge, and we all need to work together to address the skills gap."

Green Growth Through Forestry and Wood was held at the QEII Centre in London on 5 December 2024. Further coverage is available on our website.

Confor is grateful to event sponsors Gresham House, Scottish Woodlands Ltd and Tilhill Forestry, and to James Jones & Sons Ltd for providing copies of 'Timber! How Wood Can Help Save the World from Climate Breakdown' for attendees.

David Bole, the Forestry Commission's Head of Green Economy and Skills, is leading a steering group developing a sector skills plan for forestry in England. He added: "We've heard lots about global expectations placed on forestry, and to realise that we need more people and more people with the right skills. That means about 600 new people coming into the sector every year to stand still - and our colleagues in Scotland think the figure is higher."

Mr Bole said establishing a new Professional Forester Apprenticeship had been successful, with 78 candidates currently doing that qualification, and the first cohort due to complete it in summer 2025.

John Bruce, Confor's National Manager for England, said industry welcomed the progress towards producing a sector skills plan. He highlighted two areas where the industry was taking a lead - attracting military veterans and increasing knowledge of forestry at school level through STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) ambassadors.

Confor has also established a Forestry Training Service to address specific skills shortages across the UK.

Reflecting on the event, Stuart Goodall commented: "The main takeaway from today is that we are an industry with the potential to deliver across a number of Government policies; and we are ready and eager to get on with it from more tree planting to greater use of wood.

"Support from government is absolutely crucial to build industry confidence and secure the future for a sector providing economic growth, job creation, and sustainable products across the board. I hope the discussion from today and the positive words from Mary Creagh CBE MP are carried forward into real action.

"Confor will be working tirelessly to make sure our industry is on the political agenda."

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A MIXED BAG FOR 2025

In the wake of Budget announcements, ministerial meetings and a long year of political engagement, Confor's **Jon Garson** looks ahead to the landscape of 2025.

Since our last update we have been focused on building relationships with the new Labour government in Westminster while continuing to set a solid foundation for forestry in 2025 in the run up to elections in Scotland and Wales.

One of the highlights of our recent political engagement has been significant engagement with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Nature) Mary Creagh CBE MP in a number of forums.

A significant focus of these meetings has been the Timber in Construction Roadmap. Confor, as part of the Confederation of Timber Industries (CTI) alongside the Structural Timber Association Ltd and Timber Development UK, received a very positive response from the Minister when they met to seek support for continuing with the Roadmap.

This sentiment was further illustrated in comments to Confor's Policy Conference in London where the Minister made it clear she has written to relevant ministerial counterparts to ask them to continue the cross-departmental work that was underway with the previous Government.

It is hoped that this will secure widespread support in the near future, and that a formal recognition and adoption of the Roadmap by the new government will occur in time for implementation work to be taken forward in the new year.

Confor also represented the private forestry and wood processing sector in the inaugural meeting of a UK Task Force on Tree Planting. The Task Force brings together the four governments of the UK in a shared effort to increase levels of woodland creation. (See more on p17.)

Confor highlighted that delivering increased woodland creation will rely on a wide range of businesses in the industry, from tree nurseries to tree planters, and stressed that industry required confidence in the Task Force's ambitions if businesses were to invest and recruit new people.

As we look at building and broadening these engagements, we were pleased to also register the new All-Party Parliamentary Group on Forestry and Timber Security in Westminster. This group will provide a strong platform to engage and inform MPs about the sector. Additionally, it will build on previous APPGs by engaging senior officials and elected repre-



Anas Sarwar MSP, Daniel Johnson MSP and Colin Smyth MSP at James Jones Lockerbie with Managing Director David Leslie.

sentatives on addressing key concerns of the industry and influencing government policy.

Confor CEO Stuart Goodall was very pleased to arrange a visit by Scottish Labour Leader Anas Sarwar MSP and his colleagues Daniel Johnson MSP, Shadow Secretary for Enterprise & Business, and Colin Smyth MSP, Convenor of the Economy and Fair Work Committee in Holyrood, to James Jones' sawmill in Lockerbie where they met senior industry leaders.

The visit provided an opportunity for these key Labour MSPs to gain a valuable insight to the scale of the industry in Scotland and its use of modern technology.

We also saw the Scottish Government deliver its Budget on 4 December, and it's fair to say that the provisions related to forestry were disappointing.

Against the backdrop of a 40% cut to woodland planting by the Scottish Government in December (rationalised by a cut in the UK government funding allocation to Scotland), the £3.5 billion increase

announced in allocations to Scotland by Rachel Reeves in October led to an expectation that funding to woodland creation would be increased.

While we did see a restoration in funding of approximately £7 million, it is our understanding at this point that close to \$6 million of this is dedicated exclusively to native planting. Confor will seek further clarification from the Scottish Government but, at this time, those who want to secure Net Zero and support an industry that employs over 34,000 people and contributes £1.1bn to the economy are rightfully disappointed.

In Wales we have begun the process of establishing a Cross-Party Forestry Group in the Senedd. This group will be focused on addressing the negative portrayal forestry often receives in Wales through engagement with ministers and senior officials from Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales. It will also seek to involve other stakeholders to develop a wider dialogue on how forestry can develop further as a valuable part of Wales's countryside and economy.



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WHAT THE BUDGET DID FOR FORESTRY

Rob Carlow, Director of Investments & Operations, Forestry at Gresham House breaks down the Autumn Budget 2024 impact for the sector.

The Government's 2024 Autumn Budget was effectively a three-dimensional political puzzle, attempting to plug the gap in public spending commitments (without unnerving Gilt markets), increase taxes to 'protect public services', and chart a new fiscal course to deliver long-term economic growth - all while upholding existing manifesto pledges.

The Chancellor's opening remarks made clear that a tax hike of £40 billion was required, and that the Government had a mandate for change. Inevitably, there were going to be winners and losers in the speech that followed.

Spoiler alert: Forestry didn't fare too badly.

Pre-Budget

Prior to the Autumn Budget, UK forestry owners and investors benefited from three tax reliefs, namely income tax (100% relief on timber revenues), capital gains tax relief (100% relief on the gain

in crop value), and 100% inheritance tax relief after two years of ownership based on a Business Property Relief (BPR).

The intention of any 'forestry tax' should recognise that return on capital is low, and the commitment period is long. But tax is always subject to change. Until 1988, the Inland Revenue regarded productive forestry as a business with trees as a crop, and the relevant taxes were applied.

However, in March 1988 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that productive forestry would be wholly removed from the scope of income and corporation tax, heralding a fundamental shift in investor interest in the asset class. No longer could the cost of planting be offset through income tax relief i.e. Schedule D.

Post-1988 capital gains tax (CGT) was not charged on the uplift in value of the growing trees. Furthermore, the introduction of potential inheritance tax (IHT) in 1986 allowed productive forestry

assets to be treated in the same way as other business property, attracting BPR after two years of ownership.

The catastrophic Conservative mini-budget of September 2023 has left the UK tax payer in a state of high alert when it comes to fiscal policy. Many commentators speculated in the immediate run-up to the recent Budget that to meet the considerable capital raise required to satisfy Labour's plans, Rachel Reeves had all existing forestry tax reliefs in her sights.

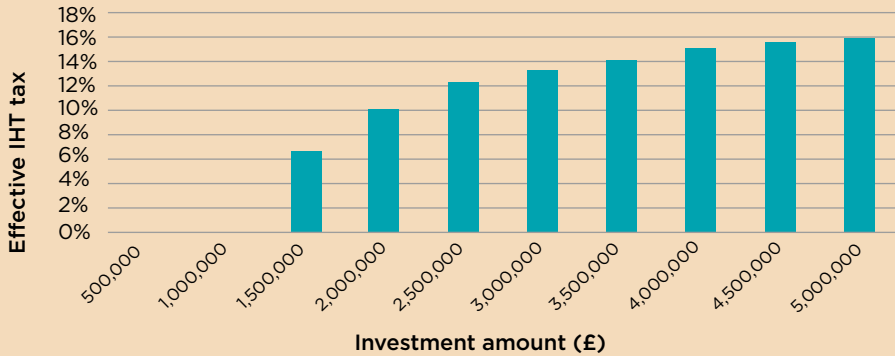
The forest industry braced for what many feared would be a sledgehammer cracking a nut.

Post-Budget

The outcome could have been much worse. Relief on income tax has remained unchanged, and higher rate CGT was increased from 20% to 24% with forestry maintaining the 100% relief on the growing crop (c. 70% of the value). IHT, on the other hand, or more specifically BPR is

continued on p14

Graph 1: Effective IHT for Individuals with Full Relief Available



continued from p13

where the Chancellor chose to penalise forest owners.

The proposed change to BPR is quite simple. From April 2026, forestry assets will no longer attract 100% relief from IHT. Instead, the first £1 million of value will attract 100% relief and assets above £1 million will pay IHT but with 50% relief (a rate of 20%).

Because of this change, the effective rate of inheritance tax payable now depends on asset value over and above £1 million. The effective IHT rate on £2 million of forestry assets would be around 10% (see graph 1).

There remain various scenarios that would increase this allowance for couples to over double the £1 million proposed.

Not all BPR qualifying assets were so spared. AIM-listed shares for example will attract the 50% relief on IHT but will not attract the 100% relief on the first £1 million of value.

The proposed changes to BPR leave forestry investment in quite a unique position. Where else can investors attract 100% IHT relief on an inheritance worth up to £1 million, with a 50% discount thereafter?

“THE INTENTION OF ANY ‘FORESTRY TAX’ SHOULD RECOGNISE THAT RETURN ON CAPITAL IS LOW, AND THE COMMITMENT PERIOD IS LONG.”

A further change announced in the Budget was that the residual value of pensions will no longer be excluded from an estate, meaning they will attract IHT at 40% with zero relief. It seems logical that this change might encourage greater investment in forestry funds and assets up to £1 million in value.

Tax is complicated, and any decisions taken regarding tax should be done so with professional advice. Not only are taxes applied on disposal and death, but they are of course also applied on receipt of income.

To visualise the impact of forestry’s various tax reliefs, we can compare the effect of tax on a £1.5 million forestry investment with the same investment

made in an equity, AIM-listed, and bond portfolio. Graph 2 compares the impact on a hypothetical stated pre-tax 8% return of both a disposal (attracting CGT) and an inheritance transfer (attracting IHT).

The impact that tax can have on stated pre-tax returns is stark. The return from a bond portfolio is almost halved at disposal, due to income tax and capital gains tax. It is almost entirely eroded by IHT transfer. Even AIM-listed funds, which pre-Budget were broadly comparable to forestry investments will be hit hard by the proposed changes.

Forestry-related commitments

Construction, specifically house building, is a major driver of timber prices in the UK. The Budget included proposals to invest £5bn in delivering Labour’s housing plan, pledging delivery of 1.5 million new homes over the next five years. The Chancellor also pledged to invest £400 million in capital across 2024-25 and 2025-26 for tree planting and peatland restoration. An announcement welcomed by the forest industry, albeit this may be drawn from the Nature for Climate Fund as opposed to being ‘new money’.

The UK desperately needs to expand its domestic forest estate. The pre-Budget forestry tax regime correctly recognised the long-term nature of productive forestry. The changes to BPR will inevitably impact some of those who have supported the Government’s aspirations of increased woodland cover through large-scale investment, and it is disappointing to see this withdrawal of support.

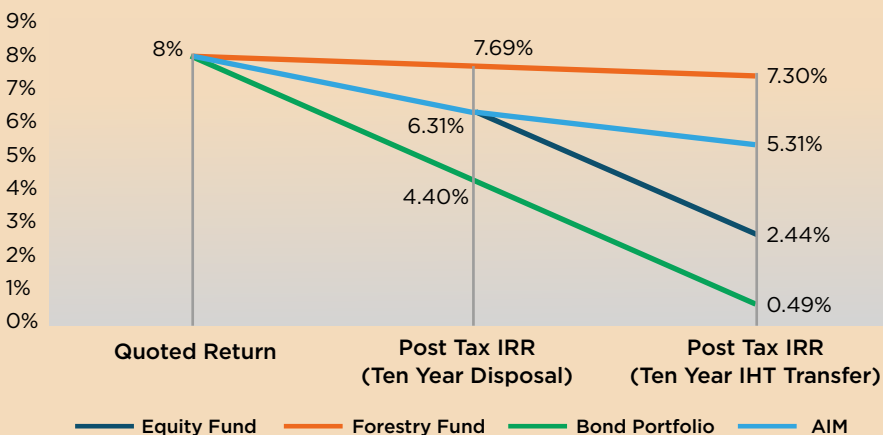
However, the more punitive changes to BPR across other asset classes (specifically AIM) have perhaps increased the appeal of forestry for anyone looking to generate long-term returns from a sustainable asset, supporting the expansion of the UK forest sector whilst also seeking to benefit from the £1 million of IHT relief still available.

It is worth bearing in mind that the changes announced are proposals, not law. The Government will publish a technical consultation in early 2025, meaning these proposals are subject to change.

Assuming the proposals are adopted as law, we are not anticipating any negative reaction. Indeed, as individuals take advice on estate planning, we may see an increase in demand for forestry assets.

The long-term fundamental drivers of forestry investing remain strong. The demand for timber continues to increase globally against an ever-constrained supply, and at the same time, society increasingly looks to low carbon land-based solutions to help combat climate change, which even this Budget will not derail.

Graph 2: Forestry vs Alternatives Post Tax Return Comparisons (£1.5 million invested)



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GLOBAL PRESSURES ON TIMBER SUPPLY

TDUK hosted their flagship global softwood market conference in London last month, bringing together speakers from the UK, Europe and Brazil. Confor CEO **Stuart Goodall** attended and shares his key takeaways.

The mood music at this conference was cautiously positive about the short-term global market and bullish about the longer-term future, though the sense was it is unlikely that the global industry will see a return to the very strong market and prices of Covid time. That said, cautious optimism is welcome after the last few years when global market conditions have been difficult.

Keynote speaker Olle Berg of Sweden's Setra Group summed things up when he said "short term challenges do not change the long-term view of a very good outlook for wood in the construction industry".

Olle was more downbeat about the Swedish situation, saying: "From a Swedish perspective, we see moderately positive trends as inflation and interest rates are now more under control. Though we still have very tight log availability, with costs remaining high, and prices are still far below what the industry needs."

This is relevant for the UK, as Sweden is by far the biggest exporter of sawn wood into the UK.

Olle's analysis is that, while markets generally should strengthen globally and business conditions improve, in Sweden the trend of tightening supply will maintain heavy pressure on margins and make it harder for Swedish mills to maintain production levels. Olle described log costs



Photo credit: Timber Development UK

as "sky rocketing" during the first half of 2024, and though sales prices were up in Q1/Q2, in no way did they compensate for log cost increases.

This challenge of tightening supply chimes with concerns over future wood supply I have heard being expressed by businesses and industry bodies from different parts of the world repeatedly this year. These sentiments reinforce the message that Confor has been making for over 18 months now – global demand for timber is trending up strongly, and global supply is not expected to keep up.

This should lead to increased concern about UK long-term timber security and flags up the urgent need for the UK to look

to increase its own future domestic supply of wood.

Global supply and demand: 2024 and 2025

The two biggest influences on the short-term global market are the US and China. In the last 1-2 years, the US market has been depressed, while China's growth has slowed, in part due to problems with its domestic commercial construction and housing sectors. It's not expected that China will rebound soon, but there are signs of growth across the Atlantic.

Olle noted that since August there had been a continuous increase in US prices, and that housing starts were up, while domestic interest rates are down, making homes more affordable to those on lower incomes.

According to Olle's analysis, there is a limit on additional wood supply that can come from within the US or provided by Canadian imports (Western Canada forests have been badly affected by bark beetle damage). This means that US demand for timber can reach a point where it cannot be met by further increases from within the US or from Canada, and the market then has to open up and look to much increased imports from places like Europe.

This expected US demand is significant, as it is the main strong positive indicator.

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES TREE PLANTING TASKFORCE

A new Tree Planting Taskforce has been launched to oversee the planting of millions of trees across the UK. Chaired by the forestry ministers from the four nations, the Taskforce brings together representatives from key arm's-length bodies and delivery partners from across the UK.

The inaugural meeting in November was hosted by UK forestry minister Mary Creagh MP (pictured below).

Top of the agenda was how to drive forward the UK's tree planting in order to meet our collective net zero targets, as part of the Government's critical mission to make the UK a clean and green energy superpower.

The Taskforce is designed to strengthen collaborative working across the UK, identifying opportunities to work together, to improve tree planting and ensure the long-term survival of woodland, safeguarding their benefits for future generations.

Ms Creagh said: "This Government was elected on a mandate to protect and restore nature.

"That is why today I am proud to fulfil our promise to set up a Tree Planting Taskforce that will oversee the planting of millions of trees across our four nations.

"Trees deliver huge social, environmental and economic benefits - from absorbing carbon dioxide, cooling our cities, improving wellbeing and helping reduce NHS costs, while a thriving forestry sector supports green jobs and drives economic growth."

Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall represented the private forestry and wood processing sector.

"Delivering increased woodland creation will rely on a wide range of businesses in the industry, from tree nurseries to tree planters," he said. "Confor members have real-life experience in how to make woodland creation work, from planning to the point of planting the trees in the ground."

A range of issues were discussed at the meeting, including skills and industry recruitment, and Stuart highlighted the need to engender confidence in the industry.

"Increased woodland creation targets won't be met without a bigger and stronger private sector, and that requires industry confidence to invest and to recruit.

"The key requirements for securing that confidence include: strong and repeated political commitment to woodland creation; sufficient, secure and multi-year grant funding; a suitably resourced public sector; and a settled operating environment i.e. avoiding frequent change to policy, rules and standards.

"If there is greater confidence in the private sector then businesses will be more likely to invest in attracting and training people."

Laying down the challenge for the Task Force, Ms Creagh added: "Trees deliver huge social, environmental and economic benefits - from absorbing carbon dioxide, cooling our cities, improving wellbeing and helping reduce NHS costs, while a thriving forestry sector supports green jobs and drives economic growth."

Richard Stanford, Chair of the Forestry Commission, was also in attendance and commented: "This new Tree Planting Taskforce, is committed to delivering the shared aims of forestry across the four nations so we can continue to tackle some of society's biggest challenges with thriving trees, woods and forests."

When summing up the discussion, Ms Creagh noted that there was agreement that, while forestry is a devolved matter, there is a shared desire to succeed and a willingness to work together on key issues like skills and recruitment.

The Minister also expressed her strong desire to see greater significance in COP meetings placed on promoting forestry's role in tackling climate change. Next year's COP30 will take place in Brazil.



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Photo credit: Timber Development UK

China is still struggling with a "real estate calamity" which is hampering domestic consumption, and consumption of timber in major European markets like Germany and France is uneven, and over all quite flat.

Middle East, North African, Japanese and Southeast Asian markets are forecast to change little, with activity "normal to good" (volumes increased gradually during 2024 in North Africa).

In terms of wood supply, Olle noted that production volumes are relatively low in Central Europe, Canada and the US, and that there were no signs of any significant increases.

Europe is experiencing raw material restrictions for a number of reasons. Sweden is seeing an increasing area of forests being removed from production for environmental reasons, central Europe has struggled with Ips devastating the Spruce resource, and there is the loss of Russian and Belarussian supply following the invasion of Ukraine.

In the US and Canada, ongoing mill closures are taking capacity out of the supply chain.

What does this mean for the UK? The recent weakness of the US and Chinese markets has meant that European exporters have looked to export to the UK, even though the market here has not been strong.

If, overall, global demand increases in 2025, and especially in the US, this could open up market opportunities. But if, as Olle forecasts, European production is little able to meet that with increased production, there could be a refocusing of European supply away from the UK.



FINAL CHANCE TO NOMINATE OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTORS TO FORESTRY

The deadline for nominations for the 2025 Confor Awards has been extended to noon on 20 December.

After several requests, Confor has made the decision to extend the deadline for Confor Awards 2025 nominations. This means you now have an extra week to tell us who you think should be recognised for their contributions to forestry in the past year.

Go to our website to submit a nomination online or download an entry form: <https://bit.ly/ConforAwards>

Entries for the Dedicated Service to Forestry Award and the ICF Professional Forester of the Year will still be accepted until their respective January deadline dates.

Our judges are looking for outstanding individuals and businesses with achievements in any of four categories:

Future Leader

This award is presented to an individual with outstanding skills, who has the potential to be a leader in the forestry and timber sector - someone showing initiative, passion and making a real difference to the sector.

Sponsored by James Jones & Sons.

Changing Attitudes

This award is presented to an individual, business or organisation promoting the forestry and wood sector in a positive, impactful way - through personal engagement, campaigning or communication, social media, or other ways.

Sponsored by Scottish Woodlands.

Building Industry Resilience

This award is presented to an individual, business or organisation taking action to futureproof the forestry and wood sector through impactful research, innovative technology development, or skills-building initiatives.

Sponsored by Forestry & Land Scotland and Forestry Commission.

Net Zero

This award is presented to an individual, business or organisation making a specific and measurable contribution to the forestry and wood industry's efforts to deliver the UK's net zero ambitions.

Sponsored by CarbonStore.

The Confor Dinner & Awards grow year on year, with 2024 seeing the highest number of attendees and nominations we have ever had. We will be returning to Surgeons Quarter, Edinburgh on 19 February 2025, and tickets are available now via our website (<https://bit.ly/ConforDinner>).

If you plan to attend, please ensure you confirm your menu choices by 3 February 2025.

The welcoming drinks reception is once again being kindly sponsored by Greentech Ltd. We are also delighted to confirm that a Confor Member discount is available for rooms at Ten Hill Place Hotel on the night of the event.

Contact the reservations team on 0131 662 2080 or at reservations@tenhillplace.com and quote "CONFOR190225" to take advantage of this exclusive rate. Bookings are subject to availability and will be charged at £139 (based on single occupancy bed and breakfast, some accommodations may vary).

Submit a nomination via the Confor website or download an entry form to enter by email. All submissions must be received by noon on 20 December 2024.

Entry Criteria & Award Information

- All nominees must be currently working in the forestry and wood-using sector.
- You do not have to be a Confor Member to submit a nomination.
- Being nominated or shortlisted in previous years does not prohibit a nominee from being nominated again.
- Judges may, where appropriate, move entries to another category better suited to the nomination submitted.
- Nominees will be contacted by Confor after entries close.
- All category shortlists will be announced in the February 2025 edition of Forestry & Timber News.
- Winners will be announced at the Confor Dinner & Awards 2025.



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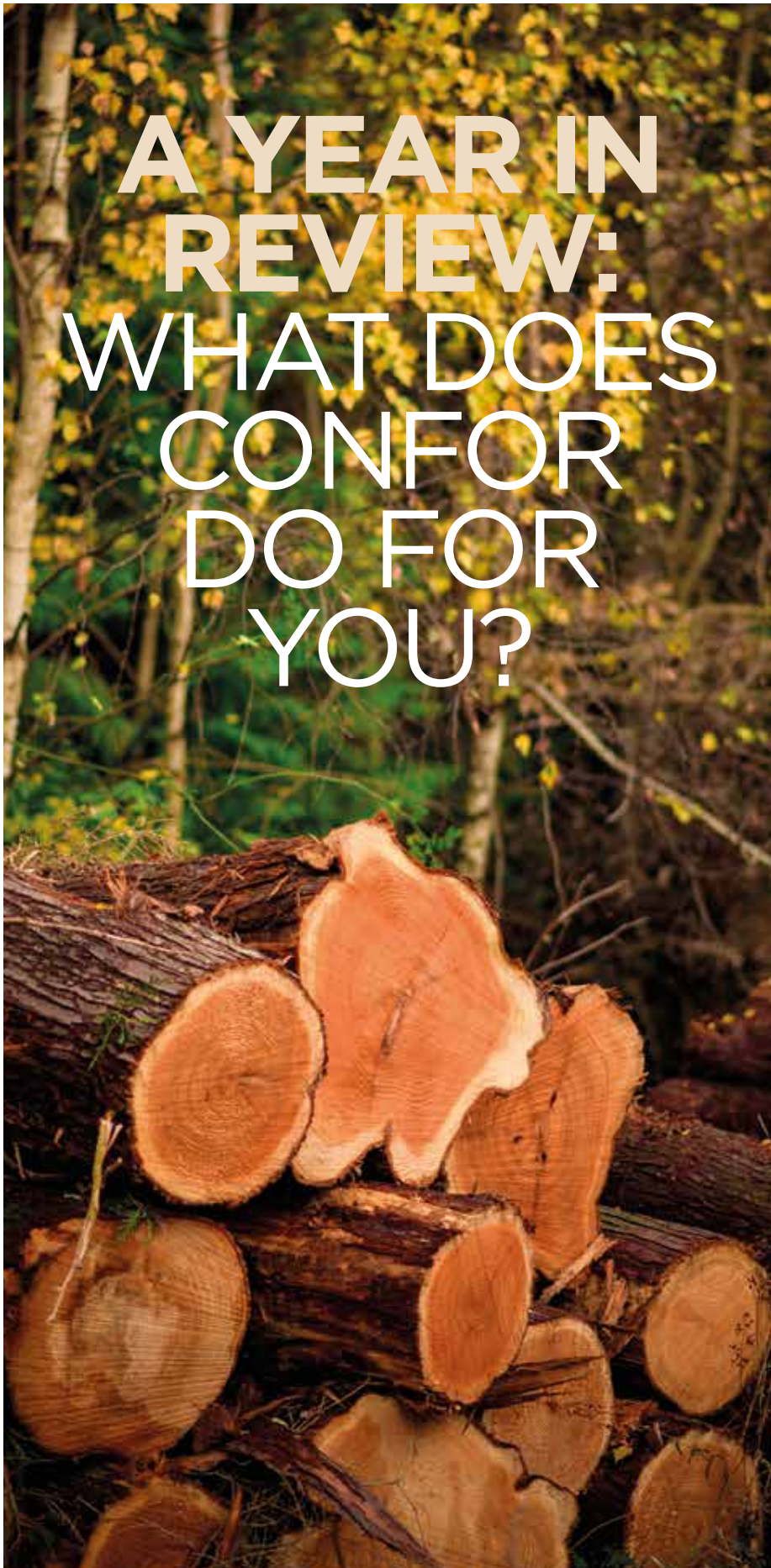
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A YEAR IN REVIEW: WHAT DOES CONFOR DO FOR YOU?

Membership & Marketing Manager **Eliza Hibbins-Cline**, along with the Confor team, takes a look back at some of our key achievements and outcomes in the past year.

Confor is working for you all year round. These are just a few highlights from 2024, illustrating the real value of your membership.

Meeting members

The APF is a key date for celebrating the great work of the sector, and provides an opportunity for Confor staff to connect with members. APF 24 welcomed over 20,000 attendees to the Ragley Estate in September and Confor once again hosted a full programme of seminars showcasing the brilliant work being done across the industry.

We also held our annual UK policy conference in early December with more members in attendance than in years prior. This is an important event every year for making your voices heard.

Wood supply

Regulators have agreed to bring forward the 50-year wood fibre availability forecast after discussion with Confor, and we have ensured significant industry representation in the working group.

In response to the National Wood Strategy for England, commissioned by the Confor chaired Industry Leadership Group (ILG) and published in 2023, Forestry Commission have agreed to aim for 30% conifer in future woodland creation in England. Additionally, we have developed routine high-level meetings with the forest agencies to discuss and address strategic issues impacting future wood supplies.

Confor is also working closely with regulators to identify additional conifer and broadleaf species with the greatest productive potential to help with species diversification.

Growing the Industry

Confor, in partnership with the major sawmills, is actively seeking to increase the market share of homegrown C16 graded timber through engagement with the construction industry and academia.

We have supported the sector in developing and/or addressing emerging issues and opportunities such as trying to get full access to new yield models, exploring better use of harvester head data, various certification issues and the potential loss of chemicals for weevil control.

Crucially, we are working with the sec-

tor to minimise the impact of the European Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) when it is introduced.

Political progress

Confor has raised the level of UK ministerial understanding of and engagement with the industry with the delivery of a Timber in Construction Roadmap (in partnership with STA and TDUK) and the National Wood Strategy for England. We have sought to further this support with the new Labour Government.

Across the UK, Confor is working to protect financial support for woodland creation in Scotland, continue the development of an industry strategy in Wales, and support the re-opening of grants for planting in Northern Ireland.

We are now rolling out a plan of significantly increased interaction with elected officials to secure greater 'backbench' support to promote the industry's interests. This includes more visits to member sites and meetings in Parliaments.



Photo credit: Michael Tubi / shutterstock.com

Confor also had a seat at the table for the first meeting of the Tree Planting Task Force, which brings together the four governments of the UK in a shared effort to increase levels of woodland creation. Establishing the Task Force was a commitment made by the new Labour Government, and its initial meeting was chaired by UK forestry minister Mary Creagh MP.

Skills & recruitment

Confor has established a subsidiary business; Forestry Training Service UK Ltd. This will aim to address market failure in the provision of technical training in specific areas critical to securing sustainable wood supply to the market.

We hosted four taster events for military veterans across England and Scotland and supported the extension of the military connect service to link service leavers with veterans already in forestry.

Confor continues to be

proactively engaged in skills and recruitment across the UK. We chair the Scottish Skills Group, are active members of the England Skills Forum, chairing the "attraction and retention" sub-group, and are working closely with Forestry Commission in the development of a Forestry Sector Skills Plan.

Other key workstreams

- Confor continues to provide secretariat services to important industry initiatives such as FISA and UKWAS.
- We have carried out a recruitment process and engaged a new Executive Officer for the Timber Transport Forum.
- The Trustees of the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund continue to receive a wide range of applications from members wanting to further their education and training.



The full 'Annual Report 2024: What does Confor do for me?' was shared with Members along with subscription invoices for 2024/25. A digital copy may be requested by emailing FTN@confor.org.uk.

MEMBER UPDATE

NEW YEAR CHANGES



Eliza Hibbins-Cline,
Membership &
Marketing Manager

As we approach the end of the year, I encourage all Members to complete our membership survey (<https://bit.ly/ConforSurvey>). The end of the year is a time to reflect, and we want to make sure we meet your needs and expectations going into 2025, so please leave us some feedback. If you prefer, feel free to email me directly.

With this issue, you should have also received our NEW Member pocket notebook, a fresh twist on the long beloved diary. We hope you find it useful, whether that be out in the forests or at meetings! Please be assured the directory, pesti-

cide information and Confor contacts remain included as normal.

A kind shoutout to our sponsors who made it possible: BSW Group, Green-tech Ltd, Fountains Forestry and Egger.

For those who attended the Policy Conference 2024, it was lovely to see you there. We hope you got a lot out of it. If you have any feedback on the event, please contact the team at members@confor.org.uk.

Our next big date in the calendar is the Confor Dinner and Awards on 19 February 2025. If you haven't already, please make sure to purchase your ticket soon - it's a great chance to celebrate forestry amongst likeminded people!

There have been several enquiries about the fate of the Confor Woodland Show in 2025. We are taking the opportunity to reevaluate the format of the Show and ensure it is still delivering ben-

efit to our members. This means there will be no official Confor show in 2025, but we do plan to have a presence at multiple regional events throughout the year.

This decision was made in part due to Nick Hoare stepping down as Chair of the event committee; Nick's contributions in the past have been instrumental in planning and hosting the Show. We are extremely grateful to him and the rest of the committee for their dedication over the years and will have an update for Members in due course.

Welcome to our new members

Scotland: WEB Forestry LTD; Highland Heritage Woodworks and Airds Estate.

Wales: Bwlch Derwin and Mr J Middleton.

England: SIA - Stove Industry Association; Wood Recyclers Association; Michelmores LLP; Max Reynolds Tree Services and Mr S Maskrey.

Contact

Eliza on 07918 880285
or email eliza@confor.org.uk

Notebook Sponsors



WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

Confor has carried out a range of work to promote and encourage engagement with stakeholders at all levels when planning new woodland creation projects. Communications Manager **Eleanor O'Neill** outlines the projects so far and what we hope to do next.

'Engagement' is a broad term and in the case of woodland expansion and creation, it's an important thing to get right to mitigate potential areas of tension with other land users and communities.

The forestry sector needs to be prepared to tackle these issues and help these stakeholders not only understand the practicalities and purpose of forest works, but also make them feel involved and heard in what happens to their local area.

Confor has identified a particular need for quality engagement in the south of Scotland, where several woodland creation projects in recent years have received backlash and negative media coverage. To support members here and elsewhere, we have undertaken work in a number of areas.

Stakeholder Engagement Training (Scotland)

Developed in partnership between Confor and Aigas Associates, the Stakeholder Engagement Training (Scotland) course was conceived with input from a wide breadth of industry representatives to ensure the content and takeaways had true value for sector professionals.

With funding support from Scottish Forestry, the programme aims to provide the tools and guidance required to mitigate engagement issues that may delay planting schemes.

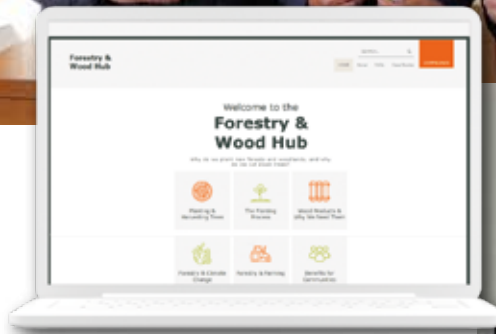
One participant said: "I really enjoyed the Confor Stakeholder Engagement Training course. The worksheets and examples that we worked through helped me to understand what our stakeholders need from us and how we can engage with them in an effective and appropriate way.

"It was valuable hearing about everyone's experiences and being able to work as a group to develop personalised engagement strategies that will be successful in the long-term."

An additional cohort just completed the training in Perth with positive results. Confor is investigating opportunities to adapt and expand the content of this course to serve other areas of the UK.

Good Practice Guidance for Woodland Creation Proposals

Confor led on the creation of a groundbreaking Guide intended to improve the process of engagement with local people



and communities in new woodland creation projects.

The document was prepared by individuals from across south Scotland with experience in responding to applications to create new woodlands and by people working in Scotland's forestry industry, with additional advice and support from Scottish Forestry and the Scottish Land Commission.

Engagement with Local People and Communities: Good Practice Guidance for Woodland Creation Proposals was published in October with a launch event in Corsock, Dumfries & Galloway.

The Guide has received widespread support, including at a Holyrood level with Cabinet Secretary Mairi Gougeon speaking positively on its release and Colin Smythe MSP submitting a parliamentary motion to welcome the publication. So far, the motion has been signed by a further 15 MSPs.

The Forestry & Wood Hub

A new microsite, the Forestry & Wood Hub, has been launched as a go-to resource for engaging and informative content on the UK's forestry and timber industry.

Hosting videos, infographics and case studies, the microsite is a public-facing

portal that addresses many of the frequently asked questions and misconceptions about the work of the industry. It covers a range of topics from how trees are planted and why we cut them down, providing accessible answers for anyone curious about the industry.

The Hub was developed in-house by Confor with contributions from PA Cooperative, Ardesey and Aigas Associates.

For the continued development of the Hub, we are encouraging members to interact with and share the resource. Please use the feedback form embedded on the site to let us know your thoughts and what you would like to see included in the future.

We also welcome content submissions and are particularly keen to include more case studies of successful woodland creation projects. Contact eleanor.oneill@confor.org.uk if interested.

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UKWAS 5 COMES INTO EFFECT

The United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) is pleased to share the new UKWAS 5.0 with an effective date of 1 December 2024.

UKWAS 5.0 was published at the start of December. At this stage, the new version has only been endorsed by PEFC with the FSC approval process still ongoing.

PEFC certificate holders will need to complete a transition audit from UKWAS 4 to UKWAS 5 before 1 December 2025. FSC certificate holders will continue to be audited to UKWAS 4 until such time as the FSC revision process is completed.

The new UKWAS Chair Ben Gunneberg (pictured) said: "Despite coming into the UKWAS revision process at this late stage, I wholeheartedly thank all members of the UKWAS revision working group who have

worked pragmatically and constructively throughout the long process to produce a revised UKWAS standard.

"My priority now is securing FSC International's approval as soon as possible."

Ben succeeds Richard Howe, who steps down after serving as Chair since 2017 and as a Director of UKWAS for nearly 20 years. The appointment was approved at the organisation's recent Annual General Meeting, and Ben brings extensive experience to the role

Both PEFC UK and FSC UK have reiterated their commitment to the UKWAS process and to the development of a joint standard for the UK.



GAME RELEASE PENS

Confor welcomes the release of UKWAS 5.0.

However, a potential issue that could affect the supply of certified timber has been identified.

Richard Hunter explains.

The requirement that industry codes of practice are followed in relation to game pens is an existing holdover from UKWAS 4 which we fully support. The issue arises with new sub sections 4.10.1b and c:

- 4.10.1b requires that no new game pens are built in areas of High Conservation Value (HCV); and
- 4.10.1c requires existing pens in HCVs to be removed within two years (so by 1 December 2026).

HCVs include Ancient Semi-Natural

Woodland (ASNW), Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Ramsar Sites, National Nature Reserves, and other priority habitats as listed by relevant national authorities.

Given the number of woodlands that are ASNW or PAWS and also act as game release pens, this has the potential to cause disruption in the supply of certified material.

The UKWAS steering group agreed at their meeting in November to explore making an amendment to these sections. Confor and others are collecting evidence now, to present their case in writing prior to a vote at the next meeting in May 2025. It is then for the steering group to agree, by consensus, whether to proceed with a formal amendment process. If there is agreement for a formal amendment, the process is the same as for any other revision.

The UKWAS revision working group will agree a new set of requirements, which will then go to public consultation and then to both PEFC and FSC for their approval. This should give sufficient time for existing certificate holders as existing pens do not need to be removed until 1 December 2026.

In the spirit of UKWAS you cannot

remove small areas of your woodland that you don't want certified, so landowners are given a stark choice - remove game release pens from HCV areas or drop out of certification. Given the often much higher income that game shooting brings to estates compared to timber values, it is highly likely that many will choose game shooting.

Confor has released a survey to assist in collecting detailed evidence to show the level of disruption to timber entering the markets that this change will create. The survey is split into sections depending on your position within the supply chain - woodland owner, manager, auditor or sawmiller. We are keen to hear from across the sector as this will impact everyone.

Anecdotal evidence shows that some estates have already decided that this is 'the straw that broke the camel's back' and have left UKWAS, with many more to follow in the coming years unless we can show that this problem is being addressed and a suitable solution is found.

Other evidence suggests that while some game release pens do cause damage to woodlands, they are unlikely to be certified and thus not striving for higher management methods that UKWAS brings. In short, the intention of the requirement was well meant but it is unlikely to have positive outputs for woodlands.

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Knowing who you're selling to and respecting their expertise is a core understanding at ForestAndArb, the Forestry division of Winchester Garden Machinery Ltd.

Winchester Garden Machinery Ltd (WGM) has been trading since 1971, starting from basic lawnmower sales and servicing before branching out into supplying a full range of specialised equipment for the horticultural, arboricultural and forestry sectors.

ForestAndArb has been a dedicated arm of the business for over 20 years, selling all things forestry, climbing and personal protective equipment (PPE) from their showroom in Winchester and prolific website.

"We've been an online business since the early days of online shopping, dedicated to providing the best and most practical equipment to foresters, Arborists & homeowners across the UK," said Martin Collins, Sales, eCommerce & Digital Marketing Lead at ForestAndArb. "Our online presence allows us to sell to vast audiences and this increased customer-base has seen the Forestry team grow from one member of staff in the beginning to a fully incorporated part of WGM."

Today, ForestAndArb.com is a familiar and well-trodden site for many in the industry. Martin has witnessed (and had a hand in) much of that online growth himself.

"When I first joined WGM, I worked as a sales advisor in our ForestAndArb store and managed the website sales process too. For a few years, my time consisted

Winchester Showroom





Clockwise from top left: Milwaukee Display; Martin Collins and Forestry Equipment Dealer of the Year 2024 awards.

of assisting our in-store customers, making sure our store always looked fresh and stocked up, and meeting with suppliers and learning the ins-and-outs of the Arb world.

“As social media became more of a part of the business, I took that on, which has then seen me progress to my current role, managing all advertising and digital output, and all E-commerce operations across the business. Between myself and my team, we manage three websites, eight social media channels, and are looking to expand again in the future with more video and written content that can benefit our customer base.”

The ethos of working to the benefit of the customer is embedded in the ForestAndArb business model.

“We’re committed to offering the best pricing for everything we sell, which means we only buy directly from the brands themselves. This gives us the best pricing structures and therefore means we can pass on savings to our valued customers. We’re not in business to rip anyone off after all!”

Martin added: “The one thing I learned is that you can’t speak to the people doing the job like you know more than them. They are the ones doing the hard work, day-in, day-out, and they know far more about the practical uses of their kit than we do, even after all our training and years of experience.

“Instead, we try to offer a balanced view on the best value equipment for their needs, which brands offer the best backup

and always make sure we have stock of the kit required.

“The brands we sell are carefully chosen with those values in-mind, and while we’re always willing to explore new additions to the market, they have to offer something new and something practical, and fill a gap in our range that our customer will appreciate.”

This is a careful selection process, rooted in an understanding of ForestAndArb’s customer base.

“We try to offer a wide range of both domestic and commercial equipment, but we put particular value on selling proven and practical equipment that we believe people will actually need, rather than just want,” Martin explained. “There is an important distinction between the two.

“A lot of businesses in the arb world are small, self-owned companies where every penny truly counts, and we don’t want to fleece anyone into spending money they don’t have to. We want to make sure everyone has the correct safety gear, the correct machinery, and the correct tools to do their job.”

That level of customer care carried on through the pandemic when the need for PPE escalated and forestry was one of the industries still working through incredibly tough times.

“We were really proud to work through the COVID lockdowns carefully, making sure that our valued customers still had access to everything they needed. Working outside meant that a lot of people were allowed to carry on working, and of

course they still needed the kit to do the job.

“We powered through with a skeleton staff, with all of our team taking a hands-on approach to make sure everyone still ordering got their orders quickly.”

This level of dedication has not gone unrecognised. Martin shared: “We have won the Forestry Dealer of the Year award three times in the last five years, and our parent company has also won overall Garden Machinery Dealer of the Year in that time. We think this shows a commitment to providing our customers the best pricing, the best range of kit, and 5-star-rated service year after year.”

Future plans will see the website and value for customers continue to build on proven success.

“As mentioned, we’re really looking to expand our digital offering with video and written content. We believe this will give customers quick access to new product reviews, instructional videos, and other helpful content. With everyone having internet access almost 24/7 these days, we want to be able to provide answers quickly,” Martin commented.

“We’re also keen to ensure that the industry carries on in safe hands in the years to come, which is why we’re proud to be hiring and training apprentices across the business. The industry is traditionally an older demographic, and it’s important that the knowledge and experience that has been learned within dealerships over the years is shared across the younger generations.”



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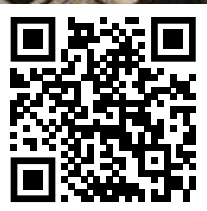
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BRANCHING OUT: A NEW FUND TO GROW THE FORESTRY WORKFORCE IN WALES

£280,000 is being invested in a new forestry-related skills and training fund by the Welsh Government, with the aim of growing the workforce and providing strong roots for the industry to bloom.

The Forestry and Timber Skills fund forms part of Wales's efforts to future-proof the workforce and provide a pathway to a career in forestry – an industry increasingly concerned by an ageing workforce and predicted skills shortages over the coming years.

The funding falls under the Welsh Government's Flexible Skills Programme and will support businesses to address skills gaps within their workforce by subsidising places on accredited forestry and timber supply chain courses, with up to £20,000 available per organisation.

In an England and Wales study of forestry businesses in 2021, respondents listed lack of skills as the main reason for unfilled vacancies.

With more skilled workers needed to meet woodland creation targets and expand the production of quality Welsh timber to fulfil the growing demand for low carbon timber-framed social homes, the Welsh Government has acted quickly to help address the issue.

One thriving Lampeter firm who are bucking the trend are eager to apply for the new scheme, having taken advantage of previous Welsh Government forestry skills funding initiatives to ensure their growing team are fully qualified.

Lampeter Trees Services, established by Islwyn Williams and his son Meirion in



1993, provides forestry services for the National Grid, local councils, Natural Resources Wales and private estates.

Meirion and his brother Emyr now run the business. Having staff qualified to industry-standard levels is a legal requirement to bid for many of the contracts that make up their day-to-day work and to date their workforce have attended nearly 400 training courses with Welsh Government funding support.

One of the staff members who has benefited from attending subsidised courses is Tomos Williams, Meirion's son. Tomos returned to the family business as a groundsman after graduating from Bangor University. He is now a qualified climbing arborist, leading a team of his own.

He said: "Without the funding I wouldn't have been able to gain so many skills in such a short time, nor would we have been able to train so many of our staff. We've been able to make sure everyone is up-to-speed. More qualified staff means we can take on more complex contracts and we're more efficient in all the jobs we take on.

"I love working outdoors. In my day-to-day work I'm in places people usually only visit on the weekend – big estates, national parks. I've had the opportunity to work on ancient trees. It's a special job."

The Minister for Skills, Jack Sargeant, has welcomed the scheme and recognises the need to secure the future of forestry in Wales.

"Foresters, arborists and those who process and work with timber are the original green jobs. But we need more of them," he commented. "We are expecting demand for timber globally to quadruple by 2050. It's vital that we expand our skilled forestry sector both to meet that demand and to achieve net zero targets.

"The fund will also support skills development to increase use of timber in construction which, in contrast to forestry, is a relatively new sector where formal skills and training have not been previously available."



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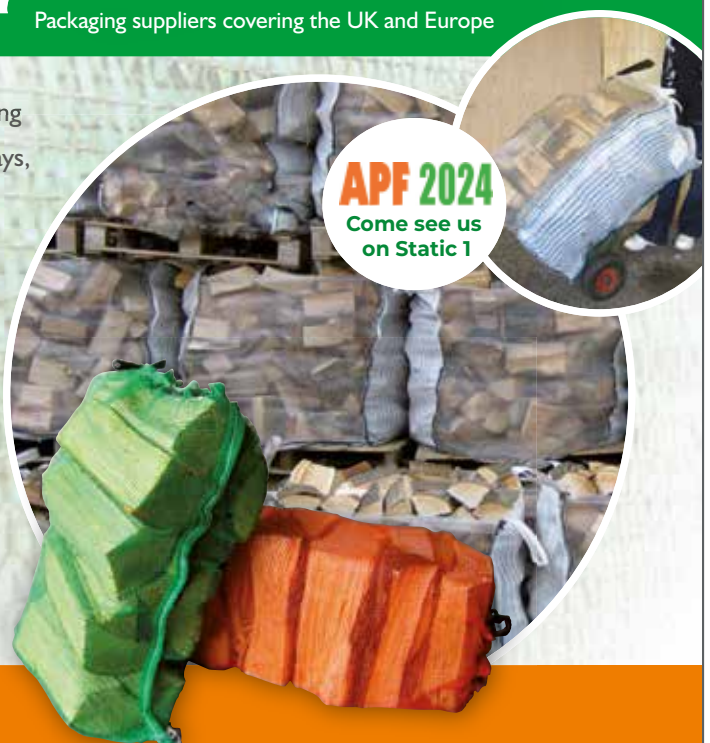
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SCOTLAND'S NEW NATIONAL PARK: WHAT'S HAPPENING?

April Armstrong, Confor National Manager for Scotland, rounds up the progress on the proposal to establish a National Park in Galloway.

In 2021/22, the Programme for Government included a commitment to designate at least one new National Park by the end of this current Parliament, provided that the legal conditions for the National Park can be met.

Conversations began in 2022 when the Scottish Government launched a public consultation on the future for National Parks in Scotland, seeking views and ideas on the role that National Parks can play. In 2023, NatureScot completed further a public consultation titled 'Approach and Criteria of National Parks in Scotland' and over the winter period of 2023/24, National Park nominations were sought and proposals assessed.

On 22 July 2024 it was announced that the successful New National Park proposal was the Galloway National Park Association and the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere's bid on the basis that it met the conditions of Section 2(2) of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000.

The government then developed and released a statutory proposal based upon this bid with the pre-consultation period running from August 2024 to the end of October 2024.

Galloway National Park Consultation - Have your say!

NatureScot, acting as the reporter to the Scottish Government, released the full consultation on 7 November 2024 and it will run until midnight on 14 February 2025.

Confor are encouraging members to



engage with the consultation process to ensure that the forestry industry's voice is heard. It needs to be noted that, at this stage, the bid is not a done deal, and we have full opportunity to raise our concerns.

You can engage with the consultation in various ways. NatureScot have been running a series of events across the proposed region and details of these can be found on their consultation webpage. You can also respond via a short or technical questionnaire.

So far NatureScot has received over 1,000 responses to their questionnaires and indications are showing balanced views for and against the proposal, so it is imperative that you share your views.

Your voices so far

Confor ran an online survey over the months of October and November,

through to mid-December, receiving over 70 responses. 78% of respondents oppose the proposal with the majority of concerns surrounding the additional challenges that a national park may create for forestry.

These include additional cost and complexity of operations, greater difficulty in obtaining approvals, and predicted lower levels of support with higher opposition.

How can Confor help you?

To support our members in responding to the Galloway National Park consultation, we are:

- Preparing a Confor industry response to the longer, technical survey and invite members to get in touch with their views. If you would like to contribute, please contact april.armstrong@confor.org.uk.
- Running a second in-person member event on the afternoon of 15 January at CatStrand Arts and Community Centre, New Galloway. This event will be hosted by the South Scotland Confor committee, who will lead a discussion to coordinate industry responses. If you would like to sign up, please head to the Confor events page.
- Providing guidance on responding to the consultation surveys. Ahead of the deadline we will be providing suggested text and data to aid with your own consultation response.

As with all consultations, we urge you to submit your own views as we have greater impact as an industry in numbers. We look forward to engaging with you and supporting you as the consultation period progresses.







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'NATURE'S GLUE' FROM SAWDUST GETS TO THE ROOT OF SUSTAINABLE CHEMICALS CHALLENGE

Sustainable biochemical innovator Sonichem reveals plans for first processing plant, expected to be based in Scotland.

A team of researchers in Scotland is supporting a clean tech startup to transform low-value co-products from the forestry sector into eco-friendly alternatives to chemicals found in everyday items.

Sonichem's ambition is to reduce the reliance on petrochemical-derived ingredients in industries such as cosmetics, packaging and pharmaceuticals. Using its patented ultrasound technology to break down forestry co-products - including woodchips and sawdust - the company extracts natural compounds that can be transformed into green alternatives to essential chemicals.

Andy West, Chief Chemist at Sonichem, explained: "Compounds derived from petrochemicals are the building blocks for so many of the products we use every day, but to achieve net zero that needs to change. Trees are a great natural resource that could become part of the supply chain and lignin, in particular, is highly versatile and can be used in almost any setting.

"But it is the natural glue that holds a tree together, which makes it difficult to extract. In the past, we explored various methods before developing the ultrasound technology to do so effectively.

"The next step in the process is about

engaging with both the manufacturers already using resin, as well as the forestry sector, to ensure that the right number and type of trees are planted now to secure the availability of the product for years to come. This project has been an important stage in the commercial development of our offering and the creation of our first biorefinery plant."

A recent feasibility study funded by the Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Centre (IBIoC), with support from the University of Glasgow, has helped the business to take its technology to the next stage. Sonichem is working towards the opening of its first commercial plant in 2027, which is expected to be based in Scotland and will process up to 15,000 tonnes of forestry material annually.

Professor Dave Adams from the School of Chemistry at the University of Glasgow, said: "Working with Sonichem, we have been able to modify the base lignin extracted from sawdust to turn it into a range of more useful chemicals. Of the five routes we tried, all five worked well, which is highly promising and gives the business the information needed to scale up this initial work to a commercial level."

Dr Liz Fletcher, Director of Business Engagement at IBIoC, added: "Scotland's

forestry sector is worth over £1 billion to the economy, but there is potential to see this grow by using the biomass that sawmills generate in manufacturing.

"Sonichem is a great example of a business looking at alternatives to petrochemicals from a feedstock otherwise used for low value applications. Up to 270 million tonnes of synthetic resin were used globally last year, highlighting the sheer scale of the opportunity to improve the sustainability of the chemicals sector."

The UK generates approximately 4.5 million tonnes of wood residues every year. The target organic substance being collected through Sonichem's process is lignin - a polymer that acts like a natural glue, binding the cells and fibres in trees and other types of plants together. This property makes it well-suited for use in products such as resins, films, coatings and foams.

Currently operating at pilot plant scale from their facility in Melton Mowbray, Sonichem is finalising the design of their first commercial plant whilst supplying kg-scale samples to potential customers for evaluation. They are also working with suppliers and end users to create fully-integrated supply chains ahead of a full commercial launch in 2027.





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NAVIGATING LIABILITY CLAIMS IN FORESTRY: AN INSURER'S PERSPECTIVE

Trust Insurance outlines the insurer's role in dealing with liability claims in forestry, from understanding the specific risks involved to managing claims effectively.

Whether dealing with tree felling, pruning or storm damage, professionals in the forestry sector work in unpredictable, often hazardous environments. As an insurer, managing liability claims requires a nuanced understanding of the unique risks involved, the legal and regulatory framework surrounding them, and the specific challenges faced by both contractors and policyholders.

These factors, coupled with the complex and sometimes high-stakes claims process, makes liability insurance a critical safeguard for both businesses and clients.

The nature of risks in forestry

Managing forest ecosystems involves high-risk activities. Workers in this field face a variety of hazards that can result in accidents causing bodily injury or property damage. These risks can be broadly categorised into the following:

- **Personal Injury:** Forestry workers are exposed to a range of physical dangers, including falling from heights, handling heavy machinery (such as chainsaws, chippers, and cranes), and working with large, potentially unstable trees. Accidents involving injury can range from cuts and bruises to life-threatening incidents such as falls, amputations, or even fatalities.

- **Property Damage:** In both urban and rural settings, the work of forestry professionals often involves close interaction with private property, buildings, roads, and other infrastructure. A falling tree or branch, misjudged cutting, or equipment

malfunction can cause significant damage to structures, vehicles, or other property, leading to expensive claims.

- **Environmental Hazards:** The forest environment itself presents its own set of challenges. Adverse weather conditions, wildlife encounters, or hazardous terrain can all contribute to an increased likelihood of accidents. Additionally, improper disposal of materials, such as chemicals or tree waste, can lead to environmental damage and subsequent liability claims.

- **Public Liability:** Forestry work is often conducted in public spaces, which can increase the risk of third-party injuries. A member of the public could be injured by falling debris, machinery, or even the act of tree felling itself. Such claims often involve complex investigations and can have high settlements, especially in urban environments where public liability concerns are amplified.

Given these diverse risks, it is crucial for forestry professionals to have appropriate liability coverage to protect themselves from potential financial fallout and is a legal requirement in respect of employer's liability. However, managing claims arising from these incidents involves more than simply paying out; insurers must carefully assess the nature of each claim especially for long-term injuries.

Tailored liability coverage: A crucial component

General liability insurance can offer a base level of coverage for forestry businesses, but given the sector's high-risk nature,

specialised policies are often necessary. These policies should be tailored to address the specific associated risks, which may include:

- **Employers' Liability Insurance:** In a sector where workers are exposed to significant physical risks, employers' liability insurance is essential. This covers claims arising from injuries or illnesses sustained by employees while on the job, including those caused by accidents, long-term health issues, spinal injuries, or injuries resulting from inadequate training.

- **Public Liability Insurance:** Public liability is critical for contractors working on private properties or in public spaces. This policy covers the cost of injuries or damages caused to third parties, whether a member of the public is injured by falling debris, waste left at the work site, or property is damaged during tree removal or pruning.

- **Tools and Equipment Insurance:** Forestry work requires specialised tools and machinery. Insuring these tools against theft, loss, or accidental damage is a key consideration, as it can reduce downtime and financial strain following an incident.

The right insurance package must also consider the scale and scope of the business. For larger companies managing multiple crews or commercial projects, insurance coverage should be designed to accommodate higher indemnity limits of liability and cover more complex operations.

The claims process: Understanding liability

From an insurer's perspective, the claims process in the forestry and tree surgery sector requires careful attention to the details of the incident, the applicable policy coverage, and the legal implications. While some claims may be straightforward, others can involve complex liability determinations, multiple parties, and long-term care of injured parties.

Key elements of claims management include:

1. **Initial Reporting and Investigation:** One of the most important steps in managing a liability claim is the timely and accurate reporting of the incident. Policyholders must provide detailed information about the circumstances leading to the claim as soon as reasonably practical, including the location, involved parties, and nature of the injury or damage. For insurers, this is the start of an investigation into whether the claim is legitimate and is the responsibility of our client.

2. **Assessing the Extent of the Damage or Injury:** Once the facts are gathered, insurers must assess the extent of the damage or injury. This could involve medical assessments, property repair estimates, or even environmental damage evaluations.



If, for instance, a third party is injured by falling debris, an insurer may need to consider hospital bills, lost wages, and potential pain and suffering, as well as any long-term effects of the injury.

3. Legal Considerations and Settlements:

Forestry professionals are often subject to strict safety regulations and industry standards, particularly regarding worker safety and public liability. If a claim involves a breach of these regulations, insurers may need to involve legal counsel to determine the potential for liability. In some cases, settlement negotiations may take place, particularly if the claim is significant. Insurers must weigh the costs of litigation against the potential payout in order to make the most financially sound decision.

4. Environmental Liability: Forestry work is often conducted in natural settings, and incidents involving environmental damage can lead to substantial claims. For example, chemical runoff from spraying or damage to protected wildlife habitats could result in significant legal and regulatory consequences. Insurers need to understand environmental laws and regulations in order to assess such claims effectively.

Managing risks and preventing claims

While insurers play a crucial role in managing claims after an incident, proactive risk management is essential in minimizing the likelihood of claims occurring in the first place. Insurers can support forestry by promoting best practices in health and

Examples

We have had a claim submitted to us by a member of the public claiming our client left timber from a recent job on a pathway within a park or a school ground. That member of public has then claimed they have tripped over the branch and wish to pursue our client for the injuries received.

We have even defended a client against one child picking up a branch and hitting another child; the claimant stated their child would not have been hit by the branch if our client had not left the stick on-site.

safety, training, and equipment maintenance. Key measures include:

- **Regular Training and Certification:** Insisting that workers are regularly trained and certified in safety protocols and handling hazardous equipment can reduce the risk of accidents.
- **Risk Assessments and Safety Protocols:** Forestry businesses should be encouraged to conduct regular site-specific risk assessments, particularly when taking on new projects. Clear safety protocols must be in place, especially when working in hazardous conditions or with high-risk clients.
- **Equipment Maintenance:** Regular inspection and maintenance of equipment can prevent failures that lead to accidents. Insurers can emphasise the importance of

maintaining safe equipment standards to minimize the chances of liability claims. It is of course a requirement under the PUWER legislation of 1998.

Managing liability claims in the forestry sector is a highly specialised and a challenging task. As insurers, our role goes beyond providing coverage to actively helping businesses navigate the complex risk landscape. By offering tailored insurance products, thoroughly investigating claims, and advocating for sound risk management practices, we can help mitigate the financial impact of accidents and provide peace of mind to businesses and clients alike.

The key to successful claims management is a deep understanding of the unique risks in this sector, a fair and thorough claims process, and a proactive approach to reducing future liabilities. By striking this balance, we can ensure the continued safety and success of the forestry industry while protecting all parties involved from the potentially severe financial consequences of liability claims and the reputation damage these claims can have on your business.



THE UK FOREST RISK COMMODITIES REGULATIONS: REGULATIONS TO ADDRESS DEFORESTATION AT ITS ROOTS

Laurence Platt, Graduate Solicitor Apprentice and **Adam Corbin**, Partner and legal expert in the Agriculture team at Michelmores LLP, explore the UK Forest Risk Commodities Regulations and what they might mean for you.

Despite the title, these regulations are not likely to directly affect UK timber producers and are not intended to directly affect UK timber importers.

These regulations are intended to decrease the sort of deforestation which can happen when an alternative land use is more attractive for farming commodities with global demand by regulating imports of those products.

These regulations do not seem to be of interest to us then?

If the regulations are effective, they represent an opportunity for the UK forestry and timber industry because they should decrease unsustainable forestry occurring in other countries, helping to increase demand for sustainably sourced timber. They are a marketing opportunity.

The Forest Risk Commodities Regulations

The Environment Act 2021 included the potential for new secondary legislation to be introduced to regulate the UK's impact



LtoR: Laurence Platt and Adam Corbin

on overseas illegal deforestation and rain-forest destruction.

Schedule 17 of the Environment Act 2021 introduces legislating powers to the Secretary of State for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs to create secondary legislation to tackle illegal deforestation in UK supply chains. These measures are seen as key to delivering the commitments made by the UK at the COP26 in Glasgow to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030.

Whilst the secondary legislation is yet to be published, in December 2023 the UK Government issued a statement about the

intended forest risk commodities (FRC) regime, proving some extra details about its proposed scope.

So what do we know so far?

The prohibited activities

When introduced, the regulations will seek to prohibit regulated businesses (discussed further below) from using illegally produced FRCs or any products derived from illegally produced FRCs in their UK commercial activities.

Which FRC commodities are expected to be caught?

FRCs are agricultural commodities that have been produced as a result of illegal deforestation. Whilst the 2021 Act does not set out which FRCs are intended to be caught by the regulations to be introduced, it does confirm that a commodity in this context is restricted to products deriving from a plant, animal or other living organism. So, whilst the regulations will have a wide affect, we do not at this stage anticipate its reach will extend to minerals and ores.

The specific list of commodities will be revealed in the secondary legislation in due course; however, the Government has indicated that initial secondary legislation will focus on four commodities which it has identified as “key drivers of deforestation”. These comprise soya, cattle products (such as beef but excluding dairy), cocoa and palm oil.

It is expected that the list of FRCs regulated under this legislation will be kept under review.

New due diligence requirements

The proposed secondary legislation seeks to put proactiveness at its heart, by requiring regulated persons to implement due diligence systems to determine the origin of the commodities they intend to use.

Regulated businesses will be required to identify and obtain information about the commodity, with a view to assessing and mitigating the risk that it was produced unlawfully (i.e. not in compliance with local laws). They will be required to report annually about the measures they have employed to ensure their commodities were lawfully sourced.

Who might be caught?

The 2021 Act refers to a regulated person as a company with a turnover above a certain threshold. In its December 2023 statement, the Government confirmed that they intend to set that threshold at £50m. The Government says this is to ensure that it is only “larger businesses” that are within scope of the regulations.

The 2021 Act does include powers for exemptions to be introduced within the regulations. Whilst further detail is expect-

ed when the regulations are published, to date the Government has indicated that businesses that are using 500 tonnes or less of each commodity per annum will be able to apply for an exemption from the obligations.

Enforcement

Schedule 17 of the Environment Act 2021 empowers the Secretary of State to include enforcement powers within the legislation. Such powers may include the right to search, inspect and seize goods and the right to penalise offenders through the use of sanctions and penalties.

The Government has already announced that we can expect to see an unlimited monetary penalty.

What about the regulation of illegally harvested timber?

Timber supply chains have been regulated to ensure legal harvesting practices are observed since 2010 by the European Timber Regulations. Upon the UK’s departure from the EU in 2020, new domestic legislation was introduced comprising the Timber and Timber Products Placing on the Market Regulations and the UK Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade Regulations (EU Exit) Regulations 2018.

The Regulations place an obligation on persons buying and selling timber products on the GB market to trace its origin and assess the risk that it was harvested illegally. It is expected that the prospective regulations sponsored by the Environment Act will be created in the image of the UK Timber Regulations, following suit in respect of the obligations it places on relevant persons, but expanding regulat-

ed commodities to a much wider class of products.

Comment

Whilst some may perceive the impending Regulations as yet another cost and administrative burden to their business, producers of British timber can take comfort that the Regulations should make UK timber more competitive and further strengthen demand for their products. By removing the incentive to clear swathes of forest to facilitate the production of cash crops, the market should see a drop in the flood of illegal timber.

The expected overall reduction in supply should bolster market prices for lawfully produced timber products and timber which is more clearly traceable as sustainably produced.

The new UK FRC regulations may therefore open some doors for British timber. Timber producers should be mindful of (and indeed take advantage of) their sustainability credentials when marketing their product, seeking to promote the assurances that can be gained from purchasing their product, and the traceability of the commodity. This will undoubtedly prove to be a key driver for businesses utilising timber in their supply chains.

If you are affected by the impending regulations or would like some further information, our team have a wealth of expertise across areas such as forestry, agriculture, regulatory work, commercial and IP and would be happy to help. Please get in touch with Laurence Platt (laurence.platt@michelmores.com) or Adam Corbin (adam.corbin@michelmores.com) for more information.



SCOTTISH SCHOOL PUPILS' PERCEPTIONS OF FORESTRY AND FORESTRY CAREERS

To better understand why the forestry sector faces a challenge in recruiting young people, **Amanda Bryan** MICFor decided to go directly to the source and speak to school pupils about forestry careers.

With support from the Forestry Industry Education Fund, I was able to undertake a research project with a focus on examining Scottish school pupils' perceptions of forestry as a career and barriers to uptake as part of my Masters in Education studies in late 2023 and early 2024.

Using qualitative methods, the research was based around eight focus groups with participants drawn from cohorts of 14-year-olds (S3 pupils) and 16-year-olds (S5 pupils) in four secondary schools. The schools chosen were all state comprehensive secondary schools but varied geographically and included a rural, mid-sized town, small city and large city schools.

We first explored questions around 'what does a forester do?', including the different tasks or jobs a forester might undertake; whether they worked indoors, outdoors or both; whether they work alone or with others; and what type of salary a forester might earn. The pupils had a relatively nuanced understanding of what working in forestry involves including surveying, health and safety, wildlife management, tree health and raising awareness, not just planting and cutting down trees.

There was good knowledge of the need to understand site conditions to enable

tree growth with mention of soil moisture and pH as well as consideration of shade/light levels. There was also some attention to the fact that you cannot just plant trees anywhere. Pupils talked about the fact that most forestry roles would be likely to involve both indoor and outdoor work, with indoor work focused on planning and recording.

They felt that teamwork would be a key element and recognised the need for health and safety. Their knowledge sprang not from direct experience but through thinking about what they had learned in school and also roles that their parents had - one pupil talked about their father's work as a surveyor in the renewable energy sector.

The discussion then moved to 'what does a forester look like?' and at this point any nuance disappeared. Using an exercise based on looking at photographs (all of foresters but in non-forestry settings), pupils were asked to select three images that they thought depicted those working in forestry and three images of people they thought definitely didn't work in forestry. The results were striking and very much based on stereotypes.

continued on p40





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continued from p38

The images which were viewed as being most representative of a forester showed men, 31+ years of age, either wearing fleeces or a checked shirt; two of which were clean shaven and two had beards. When asked why these images had been selected, often a 'vibe' or 'the fit' of a person to the role was mentioned, as was the background or clothing provided as justification.

Amanda: And what about this chap here in the checked shirt? Why has everyone gone for the chap here and not the woman sitting beside him?

Participant: He just looks very stereotyped (lots of laughter) huge big arms, he looks like someone who cuts down trees

Participant: we're stereotyped a bit into thinking like that. (SCS:S5)

Participant: He, he kind of reminds me of the typical lumberjack, you know that you get in cartoon films and that, which I know is probably not a good idea to base my ideas off but... {laughter} (MSTS:S3)

The images that were selected as being least representative of a forester were of two younger men and one older woman. They were all in environments that would not typically be associated with forestry – a car, a train and with a city street in the background. Participants frequently cited their reasons for selecting these individuals as not being foresters as they were 'too clean' or smart looking.

Participant: The dude in the car doesn't look like he's dressed for forestry

Participant: He's in white trainers
Amanda: He's in white trainers, so okay, so it's to do with clothing?

Participant: Yeah. (RS:S3)

We then moved on to talking about what they were considering as a career and what had influenced their choices. Very few of the participants had considered a career in forestry; only a small number in the rural and small city schools who had family connections to agriculture/conservation. The majority of participants were not even aware that forestry was a career option:

indicated that it would be more likely that they would engage with materials inside school than in their own time, say on social media.

In summary, what I found was that there are five key influences on career selection, and this is no different for forestry as for other careers. These are:

- Personal exposure either through direct experience or through knowing professionals already working in the field.
- The views and behaviours of parents or other gatekeepers such as teachers.
- Stereotypes or lack of representation e.g. social class or gender.
- Lack of knowledge of what a career might involve or even whether it exists as an option.
- Broader societal perceptions of the sector – this can be both negative (extractive, bad for the environment) or positive (conservation and protection of native forests).

However, the real challenge we face is the pervasive stereotype of foresters (male, older, physically strong, dressed in warm and practical outdoor clothing), combined with a lack of exposure to the forestry sector is likely to be a contributory factor in the low demand for forestry courses and careers.

“The real challenge we face is the pervasive stereotype of foresters (male, older, physically strong, dressed in warm and practical outdoor clothing).”

Amanda: I don't know how much of a recognised career it is, you know already, I think people might not have heard about it that much, compared to others. **Participant:** It was only when I heard about it as someone who was taking it as a college course, that I realised that they did college courses in it. (SCS:S5)

Further discussion using examples of specific 'forestry career' resources indicated that they had not come across any of these and they questioned how they might find or get access to them. They in-

Having visited the American Midwest to look at how they embed forestry education in schools in May 2024, I'm now working on how to enable more people to have access to forestry education programmes within the school system, looking at curriculum, teacher CPD and access to sites.

If you would like to help with this then please get in touch (amanda.bryan.ic@uhi.ac.uk).



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CRITICAL SKILLS FOR A CAREER IN FORESTRY

Recipients of grants from the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund in 2024 share their research and upskilling experiences.

Kelly Morss, Bangor University, considers 'Do we need foresters at all?'

This provocative question is posed in the 'Forest History, Policy and Management' module description, one of the options delivered as part of the Bangor University MSc in Forestry. Considering this is my future career we are talking about; I thought I had better find out.

The module is designed to give students an understanding of how the interactions of policy, people and events on a national and global level have resulted in the landscapes we see today, the legacies of decisions that previous generations made, and the impact ours may have on future generations.

The module covered topics such as the circumstances that triggered the establishment of the Forestry Commission in the UK, the legacy of post-war conifer plantings, globalisation, certification, forest restoration and management planning. We were challenged to examine our long-held beliefs, tightly grasped viewpoints and received wisdom, developing and refining skills in critical thinking, debate, listening, self-reflection and awareness.

And what a time to have studied this



topic given the current political climate. Within the relatively short window of the module (October 2023 to April 2024) the UK saw two prime ministers, three environment ministers and two forestry ministers. In December 2023, there was the opportunity to attend the Confor UK Pol-

icy Conference, where the National Wood Strategy for England was launched.

Amidst the disruption of a train strike and the press buzz of Rishi Sunak's 'Stop the boats' speech, a collective voice had never been needed more to be heard over the political noise.

As I write, the Labour party are wrangling with the first months of their tenure as we all wait to see what impact this change of government will have. When an industry works on cycles of years, decades and centuries, the incompatibility with fast paced government changes and paradigm shifts is keenly felt.

With the responsibility of the nation's timber, ecology and climate on the industry's shoulders, it was a reminder to be mindful of the legacy our choices will have on the nation's landscape for which we will be judged long after we are gone. Will we choose to maintain the status quo or disrupt the narrative and most importantly, why?

I am grateful to Dr Alec Dauncey for his tutelage, insights and devil's advocacy dished out with a regular 'but what about...?', which was always encouraging but usually derailed any hastily chucked together hypothesis. Thanks to my fellow students for sharing their own experiences, opinions and challenges.

Finally, thanks to the Forest Industries Education & Provident Fund for enabling me to progress with my studies as I work towards a career in this dynamic industry.

Silvie Hill takes on chainsaw certification

I completed my training for the chainsaw courses CS30 & CS31 at Kernow Training in Cornwall. I found them to be very informative on maintaining my tools, on practical techniques for cross-cutting and felling of small trees, and on working safely.

The course was comprehensive and the instructor very patient, making all aspects of the course easy to understand and follow. There was also some theory work in the course, which was always backed up with detailed demon-

strations, followed by practical exercises that we had the chance to repeat until we felt comfortable moving on.

Without the award from the Education Fund, I would have missed out on this training opportunity. In the future, I am keen to go into conservation of woodlands, as they are a vital habitat in the UK that has, over the past century, been neglected in terms of sustainable management.

My time volunteering before completing this training had got me interested in

the sustainability of historical woodland management techniques. The courses that I completed will allow me to develop these skills, and hopefully work with these practices in the future.

I'd like to employ the skills that I have learned on this course by working for a wildlife organisation to help in habitat restoration and conservation. Having this training has also helped me gain confidence in being able to work as a woman in the male-dominated forestry sector.



FOREST MARKET REPORT

No sign of a rush to market

The new Labour government's Autumn Budget statement has left many in the rural sector worried about the future. In this issue of the market report, Tustins summarise the three main points likely to impact the forestry market in the coming months.

Tustins has received numerous calls seeking clarification on the changes to agricultural and business property reliefs, capital gains tax and pension fund transfers, with some predicting a catastrophic impact on forest owners.

However, many forestry property advisors, including Tustins, remain calm about market prospects. Forestry continues to be a cost-effective or even profitable way to transfer large amounts of capital to the next generation with a low tax rate. Consequently, a rush to sell off properties is not anticipated.

Forestry investors need to be cautious to avoid paying higher taxes inadvertently. Various solutions have been proposed, but many could result in higher overall tax burdens.

Government consultation and future Prospects

The government plans to consult on the inheritance tax (IHT) changes in the coming months. It is crucial for stakeholders to respond to this consultation to potentially influence the new rules and make forestry an even more attractive investment. Suggestions include, for example, removing the value of timber crops from estate values at probate.

Those with long memories will recall the significant changes in the 1980s which gave with one hand and took away with the other. The Chancellor had given agricultural property relief to farmers and forest owners and so Nigel Lawson felt confident to remove Schedule B and D along with the tax-deductible status of forest establishment costs and this had

major effects on the industry as a whole.

This status quo has rather been disrupted by the reduction of IHT relief to 20%

Current market trends

The past few months have been exceptionally busy at Tustins with over 30 properties agreed and placed under offer in the southern two-thirds of the UK. Properties are being agreed at or above guide prices, provided those prices are sensible. However, determining the right guide price has become challenging due to property variability.

Arriving at the correct guide price for a particular property is a delicate art, it requires the agent to anticipate the type of buyer that is likely to be successful and determine value of the wood within >>



>> that specific sector. Vendors benefit from choosing a specialist forestry agent to ensure that the most appropriate guide price is selected.

The pre-Budget rush saw an urgency to complete sales and we had an increase in enquires to transfer woodland ownership within families as there was significant concern that the Labour government may look to change the tax regime overnight. This sudden flurry of activity is likely to have given the Exchequer a bit of boost but sadly this did not deter the Chancellor from her course of action.

Prices in the commercial property sector have remained stable within England and Wales, which is likely to be linked to the stability in the timber market that we

have seen, with only a slight dip in timber prices during the autumn. In recent years it is safe to say that the commercial forest market has begun to mature away from a total reliance on tax breaks and is now guided by timber prices and access/location of mills.

The amenity-focused sector faces more challenges, with low annual outputs causing some to question the economics of these investments. However, future cash generation from Biodiversity Net Gain or Nature Recovery finance remains a possibility.

Notable property transactions

Significant properties agreed or nearing agreement include:

KEY BUDGET CHANGES AFFECTING FORESTRY

1. Reduction in Agricultural and Business Property Reliefs: Starting April 2026, reliefs will be reduced to 20% from 40% on property values over £1 million. For properties owned by a husband and wife, this effectively means £2 million of full inheritance tax (IHT) relief, with everything above taxed at 20%. For example, a £3 million property owned by a couple will incur £200,000 in tax, an effective tax rate of 6.6%.

2. Increase in Capital Gains Tax (CGT): From April 2025, CGT on the sale or transfer of commercial forest properties will rise to 24%. This tax applies only to the capital value increase of the land under the trees, typically around one-third of the total value.

3. Changes to Pension Fund Transfers: The ability to transfer pension funds tax-free on death has been removed. This could force the sale of woodlands in pension funds or SIPPS to release cash or risk a 40% tax as the money moves between generations.



- **Bell Coppice:** 204 acres of mature oak forest in Wyre Forest marketed by Tustins, agreed in late summer, guided at £1.69 million.
- **Harrison Woods:** a 483-acre complex in Lincolnshire, guided at an optimistic £3 million by Masons.
- **Hamptworth Common:** 232 acres of pine forest in Hampshire, marketed by Knight Frank, guided at £1.5 million.
- **Chawleigh Barton Wood:** an attractive mixed woodland of 73 acres in Devon, marketed by Tustins and guided at £395,000.
- **Withy Copse:** 95 acres of mature beechwood in the Chilterns, marketed by Tustins and guided at £850,000.
- **Cleobury Coppice:** 121.8 acres of commercial conifer forest sold for a low guide price of £900,000 by Goldcrest.

Off-market deals have also become more common, with several large transactions agreed to our knowledge.

In conclusion, while the new budget has introduced significant changes, perhaps disappointment the forestry market remains resilient and still benefits from other tax reliefs that recognise the long-term business of growing trees. Investors and advisors are adapting to the new landscape, ensuring that forestry continues to be a viable and attractive investment option which should help to reduce our reliance on timber imports.

TIMBER MARKET REPORT

Navigating challenges in a shifting landscape

Andrew Leslie MSc MICE, Senior Timber Buyer at AW Jenkinson Forest Products, reflects on the past year's timber market and considers the opportunities for 2025 and beyond.

As a timber buyer with years of experience, I've learned to sense the market's ebb and flow not only through numbers, but through instincts honed by exposure to its fluctuations. The timber market in 2024 has been a story of contrasts - moments of cautious optimism tempered by stark realities surrounding supply and demand imbalances.

As the year closes, let's examine the dynamics shaping the industry and what lies ahead in 2025.

Supply and demand: A delicate imbalance

As a global commodity, timber is heavily influenced by international demand, currency fluctuations, and regional market conditions. In the UK, a strong Sterling makes imported Scandinavian timber more competitive, shifting supply dynamics.

Meanwhile, sluggish growth in the UK's private housing sector has seen sawmills operating at around 70%-80% capacity, limiting the volume of co-products such as wood chips, which are important for industries like paper manufacturing, panel board production

and, to a lesser extent, the biomass sector.

In response, sawmills have scaled back operations, avoiding a market oversupply of sawnwood, but exacerbating existing bottlenecks in the supply chain (Forestry & Timber News, Aug/Sep 2024).

A.W. Jenkinson's ability to source timber from a diverse range of suppliers has helped us manage rising chipwood and pallet wood costs more effectively. Yet challenges remain, especially with pricing discrepancies across products and regions. The current market is far from straightforward, but it offers opportunities for those willing to navigate its complexities.

While market conditions remain volatile, the potential for growth exists - if we can manage the short-term turbulence and position ourselves well for longer-term trends, such as novel technologies' demand for timber.

Looking ahead to 2025: Cautiously optimistic

Government initiatives, particularly those aimed at increasing housebuilding, may provide a significant boost >>



>> to the demand for construction-grade timber. For instance, the Labour government's pledge to build 1.5 million homes over the next five years (with 300,000 new homes each year) could drive up demand for UK-grown timber.

If these targets are met, sawmills are likely to ramp up production, leading to an increase in sawmill co-product availability, and availability of chipwood, pulpwood, and pallet wood will improve.

However, Sterling's fluctuations and interest rate fluctuations could temper this growth. A stronger Pound might make imported timber more attractive, potentially stalling the recovery of the domestic market for construction timber. On the other hand, if Sterling weakens, then domestic production will be able to compete with imported sawn timber.

On a more positive note, advancements in timber quality and timber technology – such as improved genetics and innovation – offer hope for the UK timber industry. Over time, these innovations could make UK-grown timber suitable for a wide range of applications, levelling the playing field and strengthening the domestic sector in the long run.

As we approach 2025, the outlook for the timber market remains mixed, but there are some reasons to be cautiously optimistic. A potential upturn in construction demand could drive sawlog demand, leading to more timber harvesting and greater availability of co-products.

The key takeaway from 2024 is the importance of adaptability. The timber market is unpredictable, but rewarding for those of us prepared to respond swiftly to challenges and opportunities. As we enter 2025, staying agile and focused will be vital.

Here's to finding balance and navigating the shifting tides of the timber market in the year ahead.



Recent clearance of 20-year-old ash in County Wexford

IRELAND REPORT

Dieback devastation: The state of Ash in Ireland



Ash has enjoyed a cultural and commercial stronghold in the Republic of Ireland for decades.

Seán Lenihan, Kestrel Forestry Consultants Ltd, details how the spread of Ash Dieback has impacted planning, planting, and even sport.

Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) was first discovered in Ireland in County Leitrim in October 2012, and within a relatively short period of time was diagnosed in all other counties. At the time, ash was the predominant broadleaf species in the country and had been extensively planted by private forest owners since the first CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) was introduced in the mid-1990s.

It would have been a foresters first choice over oak and beech when selecting a broadleaf species due to its potential as a cash crop on the right site (Yield Class 10+), where a first thinning could reasonably be expected to start at year 12, and could be followed by subsequent thinnings in four-year cycles. In addition to the production of valuable top-class fuelwood in the early thinnings, a grower could also have looked forward to harvesting ash butts for our national game of hurling after 25-30 years.

Even to this day, if available and viable, hurley ash butts can fetch €500 per cubic metre and more for special lots. Ash (or Fuinseog in Irish) has always held a special place in Irish life and folklore because of its association with hurling – being the raw material for the hurley stick or camán. This has led to the often use of the phrase “Clash of the Ash” during hurling matches.

So, it was a big shock to the Irish psyche, maybe more than anywhere else, when it became clear that this disease

was going to practically eliminate Ash from the Irish landscape.

It is estimated that there were 28,000 hectares of Ash plantations back in 2012, and the latest figures we have for 2022 indicate that there are still 24,000 hectares left. The first decision the Forest Service made in 2012 was to remove Ash from the list of approved species for Afforestation and other similar grant and premium aided schemes, and to introduce the first Ash Clearance and Replanting grant aided scheme in 2013.

Under this scheme owners were paid a grant to aid site clearance and a replanting grant. The uptake was reasonable and approximately 1,000 ha. were cleared and replanted up to 2018. However, a decision was made in spring 2018 to suspend the scheme pending a full review, which wasn't concluded until 2020. Finally, a new scheme was launched in 2021.

In the intervening years the condition of affected plantations had deteriorated significantly. By the time clearance works commenced in 2022 (due to delays in processing applications) the percentage of unrecoverable timber had increased dramatically. This development generated much disquiet and anger among growers and foresters who rightly believed that the three-year delay in introducing a new scheme had caused financial losses due to reduced timber volumes.

Another major issue was the require-

ment for plantation owners to get planning permission from their local authority if they wanted to replant with a conifer species. This was deemed to be very unfair to growers who effectively were being forced to replant another broadleaf with no hope of any real commercial return, unless they took their chance with their local authority and went through the planning process.

The industry successfully lobbied for a change, granted in 2021, which allowed growers to plant a conifer as a replacement provided the area did not exceed 10 hectares. Further lobbying by the industry eventually led the Forest Service to introduce of a brand-new improved scheme in 2023 as part of the new Five-Year Forestry Programme.

Ash Dieback Scheme 2023-2027

Under the new scheme, clearance grants were increased from €1,000/ha to €2,000/ha, and the replanting rates were set at the same level as the new afforestation grants. Replanting with Sitka spruce qualifies for a maximum grant of €4,738/ha and replanting with oak €8,184 euros/ha.



In addition, the Dept of Agriculture introduced a Climate Action Performance Payment in 2024 of €5,000/ha to be paid in three instalments. There is no doubt that the CAPP was just a convenient mechanism with a topical name selected to add more money to the pot as a way of appeasing the industry. However, the amount is not insignificant and is to be welcomed, as is the fact any timber recovered from the ash harvesting belongs to the owner and is in big demand for local firewood markets.

Despite all this, many growers and producer groups are still unhappy with the current compensation package and

are continuing to lobby for more money. Some forest owners are holding out in the belief that more compensation will eventually be sanctioned. It is the view of the writer that there is nothing to be gained by holding out for two main reasons; first, the crop will continue to decay rapidly and will produce less timber at harvesting time, and second, the use of mulching machinery then becomes essential in order to clear the site in preparation for replanting at a much higher cost.

Timber revenues can be used to help pay the harvesting costs provided a harvesting contractor can be hired. Currently it is becoming more and more difficult to engage forestry contractors to harvest these sites due to the advanced decay, trees breaking up and heavy briar infestations which the operator has to beat down before cutting the tree. Most operators prefer to work in conifer crops and are now turning down ash clearance projects.

Hopefully common sense will prevail, and that the majority of the Ash Dieback sites will be cleared and replanted in the next 2 to 3 years. Delays now will only cause delays to second rotation revenues.

NEWS & UPDATES

FOUNTAINS FORESTRY REBRANDS AS F&W FORESTRY SERVICES

Fountains Forestry, the largest independent forest management firm operating across the UK, is rebranding as F&W Forestry. The change aligns the UK-based company with its parent organisation, the US-based F&W Forestry Services, Inc., one of the largest and oldest forest management and consulting firms in the States, which acquired Fountains Forestry in 2016.

“We’re proud of our heritage as Fountains Forestry and the trust we’ve built with landowners and clients across the UK,” said Douglas Murray, director of UK operations. “Adopting the F&W name marks an exciting new chapter, allowing us to leverage the strengths of a global forestry leader while continuing to deliver the personalised service and local expertise our clients have come to expect.”

Over the past eight years, the successful integration of the two companies has been supported by shared goals and a commitment to excellent forest management and outstanding customer service.

“With a strong and expanding presence in the UK, unifying under the F&W name reflects our shared values and global commitment to sustainable forest management



internationally,” said F&W President Marshall Thomas. “This rebrand reinforces our dedication to delivering exceptional service to clients across all regions we serve.”

Fountains Forestry currently operates eight offices across Scotland, Wales, and England, managing approximately 40,000 hectares of forestland throughout the UK. Established in 1957, the company has a long history of woodland management, which has continued and grown since becoming part of F&W Forestry Services. Globally,

F&W manages approximately 900,000 hectares of forests and woodlands across North America, South America, the UK, and France.

“This rebranding reflects F&W’s global reach and reputation for excellence,” added Craig Dinwoodie, director of UK operations. “Clients can continue to expect and receive the superior forestry services that have defined Fountains Forestry’s own reputation in the UK.”

www.fwforestry.com

FORESTRY AT STEMFEST

Mark Child MICFor, Programme Manager for Great Northumberland Forest, shares how an event getting young people in the north of England interested in forestry continues to grow year on year.

For the last three years, the Great Northumberland Forest (GNF) Team have coordinated a forestry stand at STEMfest. This is a three-day festival, coordinated by the North-East Stem Hub, with the aim to inform, encourage and inspire young people from the North-East and Yorkshire & Humber area into the wonders of STEM subjects, guiding the next generation towards rewarding careers.

It is a dynamic, free event for young people aged from 9-13 years old with over 3,000 young people attending from more than 100 schools.

Schools can explore an interactive, hands-on exhibition, divided into engaging STEM themed zones including Space, Cyber Security and Technology, E-Sports, Energy, Manufacturing, and Climate and Environment. Students can connect with industry professionals, gaining valuable first-hand insights into the exciting career opportunities available across the diverse STEM sectors.

Over 40 businesses and organisations are involved delivering hands-on activities, showcasing the wide range of careers and job roles available in the STEM sector.

The Forestry stand has been a cross-sector collaboration supported by Northumberland County Council (NCC), Confor, Forestry Commission (FC), Egger, Savills and The North-East Community Forest (NECF). The key themes we aim to get across are:

- To raise awareness of the benefits trees, woodlands and forestry provide.
- The importance of woodland management to sustainable products produced in this country.
- The importance of woodland creation with a focus on how trees can mitigate the effects of climate change (carbon sequestration, air quality, water quality, flooding etc).
- To raise awareness of forest resilience (fire, storms, pests and diseases).
- The various career options and education/training routes.

The stand is made up of a variety of displays, hands-on activities including timber jigsaws, and equipment such as a chainsaw and planting equipment, which the students can safely interact with. There are also four team members on hand who guide the students through the activities, and engage with them and their teachers about trees, woodlands and for-



ests and potential career paths. Schools also get a free tree pack to take away and plant at school.

There are schools that are regulars at the event who annually seek us out with their students as they get a real buzz about tree planting and forestry. We are the only stand who covers an environmental land use which teachers are keen to promote.

It is a fantastic event to be a part of, working with people from across the sector to engage with young people about trees, woodlands and forests. Special thanks to Ben Drake (Egger), Dan Brown (FC), Hannah Davison (NCC), Harriet Endersby-Marsh (FC), Ian Green (FC), James Ramskir-Gardiner (FC), Kirsten Johnson (GNF), Luke Hemmings (Savills), Marina Martignoni (FC), Nick Johnston (NCC), Paul Webster (FC), Phill Hammond (NECF), Rachael Jones (NCC), Richard Hunter (Confor) and Steve Orton (FC) for supporting the event days.

And thanks to Forestry England, Trees Please and Cheviot Trees for providing trees as part of the display and as tree packs which schools take away from the event to plant on school grounds.

The event itself has grown over the years. In 2022, the event was held at St James' Park, Newcastle. In 2023 it moved

to the Vertu Motors Arena, Newcastle. This year it was held at the Beacon of Light Centre, Sunderland. Each year more organisations attend with more interactive displays and activities - this year there were bookable experiences including a flight simulator, gaming stations and a planetarium.

The above-mentioned people and organisations who have supported the event are passionate about promoting forestry and would love to do more to attract the attention of the young people attending - however this is challenging due to the numbers of other organisations attending and the interactive displays they are able to put on.

Each year we have grown the forestry exhibition and next year we are aiming to go further with the ambition of having machine simulators and as well as the stand with more hands-on activities. If you and/or your organisation would like to be involved and support the forestry stand, please get in touch with the Great Northumberland Forest team.

For more information about the programme please visit our website: <https://nland.uk/GNF>

For more information about STEMfest please see: <https://northeaststemhub.co.uk/stemfest/>

SWL LTD ANNOUNCES ACQUISITION OF RTS FORESTRY LTD

Scottish Woodlands and RTS Forestry have joined forces under the same parent company to form the UK's largest forest management, consultancy and timber harvesting business

SWL Ltd, the parent company of Scottish Woodlands Ltd, has announced the acquisition of RTS Forestry Ltd.

The combined business will have more than 300 employees and operate across all of Scotland as well as in the north of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Scottish Woodlands Ltd has 20 offices, with around 250 staff, in all four parts of the UK, and is headquartered at Riccarton, Edinburgh. It is 80% employee-owned and provides a comprehensive range of forest, estate and land-related services.

RTS Forestry Ltd employs more than 50 people across four offices - with its headquarters in Crieff, Perthshire and bases in Inverness, Inverurie (Aberdeenshire) and Hexham, Northumberland. It offers wide-ranging services in forest management, consultancy, wood fuel, timber harvesting and utilities.

Ian Robinson, Managing Director of

Scottish Woodlands Ltd, said: "We are delighted to welcome RTS into the SWL Group and look forward to supporting the continued development of the business. RTS brings to the Group a respected and highly skilled team of staff who have grown the company significantly in recent years.

"We are pleased that the existing senior management team are remaining within RTS to continue to develop the business. With the support and expertise of our own team within Scottish Woodlands and the SWL group, an exciting future can be expected for RTS staff and their forestry clients."

RTS Forestry Ltd will continue to operate under the RTS name as part of the enlarged group.

Norman O'Neill, Managing Director of RTS Forestry Ltd, added: "When we took the decision to investigate a sale process, the requirement to secure a stable future for RTS staff and our clients was the pri-

mary objective. Scottish Woodlands was by some distance our preferred choice and we are delighted to see the sale conclude in a straightforward manner.

"The sale provides long-term stability for the RTS team and an opportunity to develop their careers within a larger group. We are delighted to continue to move the RTS business forward with Scottish Woodlands Ltd, an employee-owned business of remarkable financial strength, and highly regarded within the industry. The senior management team within RTS look forward to continuing our stewardship of RTS within the expanded group."

Both organisations have forest management as the core business area with complementary timber harvesting, consultancy, utility and renewable energy divisions. The purchase also provides SWL Ltd with a direct introduction to the UK biomass industry where RTS is a leading woodfuel supplier to small and medium-scale biomass boilers.





LEADING MARKET REPORT SAYS SPECIES DIVERSITY KEY TO THE FUTURE

The need to develop resilient forests is the main theme of the annual report produced by Tilhill Forestry and Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group

The UK forestry industry has proved resilient in 2024, despite facing economic challenges. According to The UK Forest Market Report 2024, produced by BSW Group's Tilhill Forestry and Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group, the market remains strong, driven by demand for high-quality assets, stable timber prices, wider natural capital projects and a positive medium-term outlook for wood being used as a substitute for high carbon materials.

Market overview: Resilience amid economic shifts

In 2024, £95.4m of forestry was listed for sale in the UK, a 55% decrease on the

previous year. The market numbered 44 properties with a total of 5,400 stocked hectares and an average valuation of £18,600 per hectare. Scotland continued to dominate with a 79% market share.

This year saw a drop in the pricing of agreed deals. However, an unusually high proportion of northern Scotland properties, which are typically lower in value due to the distance from core timber markets, distorted the market. When adjusted for outliers and northward skews, like-for-like valuations were close to flat, reflecting a healthy calibration after many years of steep increases. Strong demand for assets remained, despite challenging headwinds.

Investor sentiment was cautious but

steady. With greater political certainty after the budget, the report forecasted plenty of opportunities in 2025, with several high-value properties expected to come to the market.

Planting land: A shrinking supply

- In Scotland, the volume of land available for sale dropped by 40% to 1,600ha, as availability of land suitable for commercial forestry continued to tighten despite sustained demand.
- Planting land listed in England increased 92%, to 1,600ha, and averaged £14,500 per gross hectare (13% down).
- In Wales, planting land also increased by 92%, to 1,300ha, with the average at £16,800 per gross hectare (26% up).

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>> The heat has come out of the market but demand for planting land definitely still outstrips supply, which has been greatly reduced over the last 18 months.

Sustainability: Addressing environmental challenges

Good silviculture will be key to the future of the sector, said the report. While Sitka spruce remains dominant, the industry faces increasing environmental pressures, including droughts, pests, and climate change.

Experts stress the need for species diversity and improved silviculture practices to ensure long-term resilience. Effective forest management, with a focus on sustainability and biodiversity, will be essential to safeguarding the sector as climate change impacts forest health.

Carbon credits and natural capital: A growing investment opportunity

The market for woodland carbon is at an important juncture with the next few years potentially offering “rich opportunities”. Projects with ecological benefits, such as biodiversity and water quality improvements, achieved 2-3 times higher prices for carbon credits than standard rates, highlighting the demand for sustainable land investments.

In England, properties with natural capital opportunities rose by 16% to £14,500 per gross hectare, potentially driven by the influence of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regulations. Meanwhile, land with natural capital potential dropped 44% to £3,100 per gross hectare in Scotland (distorted by a couple of highland estates offered at relatively low prices) and rose 7% to £18,100 per gross hectare in Wales.

Expert insights:

Market sentiment and investment outlook



Xander Mahony, Head of Forestry Investment at Tilhill Forestry, commented: “This year’s report shows a resilient yet evolving UK forestry sector, where, despite investor caution, there is strong demand for quality assets. Stable timber prices, recovering interest in natural capital projects, and the rise of biodiversity regulations are driving growth.”

created considerable activity immediately beforehand and he pointed to the enduring appeal of land and forestry-based investments.



Confor Chief Executive Stuart Goodall added: “The Forest Market Review report always provides interesting insights to the state of the forestry industry and into perspectives about its future. While there continues to be significant interest in forests from a carbon and wider natural capital financial perspective, the report reinforces that for most people investing in a forest is about the core financial returns from timber sales.

“Using more timber in housebuilding and construction, and planting more fast-growing trees, is a proven way to reduce atmospheric carbon and help achieve vital mid-century net zero targets. It’s very difficult to chart a pathway to net zero that doesn’t include forestry and wood, and that’s great news for a Scottish industry success story that now employs over 34,000 people, mainly in rural areas, and contributes over £1.1bn to the economy.”



Jon Lambert, partner at Goldcrest Land & Forestry Group, echoed this sentiment, noting that buyers were “somewhat cautious and selective”, similar to last year. Uncertainty around the Labour Government’s first Budget

STRONG ROOTS IN WOODLANDS AND FORESTRY CHAMPIONED AT SCOTLAND'S FINEST WOODS AWARDS 2024

A bumper year of entries saw excellence in all sectors, from community to forestry, conservation to farming and climate to schools.

Local groups, farmers, foresters and large estates were all recognised at Scotland's Finest Woods Awards 2024, hosted for the first time at the Scottish Parliament to coincide with National Tree Week.

Jean Nairn, Executive Director of Scotland's Finest Woods, said: "After tireless work from our dedicated team of judges, we are proud to have such a fantastic group of winners.

"The production of high-quality timber in an environmentally-sustainable way, and the use of woodland by farmers to help them improve their yields as well as creating biodiversity, are just some of the great examples of how woods and forests can boost both the climate and the economy. When you add in the work of communities, schools and hard-working smallholders, you have a superb range of work to champion.

"Here's to the future of Scotland's wonderful woodlands and forests - they are certainly showing strong signs of growth."

Scotland's Finest Woods Awards 2024 saw 11 trophies awarded in six categories - Quality Timber, Farm Woodland, New Native Woods, Community Woodlands, Climate Change Champion, and Schools and Early Years.

Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform & Islands, who presented many of the Awards, said: "This year's Scotland's Finest Woods Awards is a fantastic way to celebrate the very best in forestry in Scotland and to pay tribute to the many people and organisations that devote so much time and effort into creating and caring for woodlands.

"The sheer variety of awards, including farming to communities and schools, to native and productive woodlands, really demonstrates the breadth and depth of forestry in Scotland.

"Congratulations everyone involved and especially the winners who have had their hard work recognised in this prestigious way."

The Dulverton Flagon, a special prize for the successful balance between commercial forestry and competing objectives, was won by David Shepherd and



Annie Griffiths for Craggach Woodland, Inverness-shire. The pair have transformed a 1950s conifer plantation into a site growing high quality broadleaf timber within a biologically and structurally diverse native wood.

In other Quality Timber Awards, the James Jones Trophy for New Commercial Woods went to Dalnavie, Alness, Highland, owned by Potanow Forestry LLP and managed by Tilhill Forestry.

The woodland creation scheme was designed to create a sustainable, productive timber resource that protects and enhances key habitats, whilst promoting other benefits such as public access, landscape character and amenity value.

The judges were very impressed with the outstanding quality of early growth and said the site has used machine planting well. They added: "Dalnavie has fitted well into a wooded landscape and is well placed to provide high quality timber to a number of local sawmills and to the wider forest industry."

A plan to improve timber quality while maintaining tree cover to protect the soil from erosion and provide shelter and food for wildlife saw the award for a Single Stand, Compartment or Small Wood and the Hunter Blair Trophy for Silvicultural Excellence go to Forestry and Land Scotland for East Loch Ard Forest - Lochan Spling in the Trossachs.

The judges said: "It was heartening to see the switch to crown thinning in this stand and the upskilling required for both supervisors and machine operators. The outcome is excellent: a more open stand retaining deep-crowned and more stable trees; an enhanced visual experience along the recreation routes; increase in light to initiate natural regeneration; on track to ensure a higher yield of sawlogs."

Community woodlands are also a key part of the Awards and the prestigious Tim Stead Trophy for overall Community Woodland Award Winner went to Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust for Dùn Coillich, Perthshire, who won the Large Community Woodland Group competition.

Emma Harper MSP, member of the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs and Islands Committee and the Awards ceremony's sponsor MSP, said: "Scotland's Finest Woods Awards are a great opportunity to celebrate our trees and woodlands, and especially, all the inspiring people who care for them, including from Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, in my South Scotland Region. I'd like to congratulate the award nominees and everyone involved.

"I am thrilled to be sponsoring the Awards reception in the Parliament and look forward to speaking with, and hearing from everyone who is passionate about Scottish woodlands and the economic and environmental contribution they make to our communities and country as a whole."

What's ahead for the forestry sector in 2025?

Experts from Brodies LLP examine the impact forestry and timber businesses may expect from legislative changes in the next year.

The past year has seen a series of legislative changes in progress or put into effect that impact those who are involved in the forestry sector. Those include new holiday pay rules for workers, a more robust approach to wildlife crime, and land reform proposals that impose obligations on owners of large landholdings, including commercial forests.

Looking ahead to 2025, upgrades to the electricity grid network will continue to come into contact with forestry areas, and so will be an important consideration for landowners. The recent Autumn Budget from the UK Government also means further changes for some individuals and businesses operating in, or investing in, the sector.

In this final edition for 2024, legal experts from Brodies cover some key topics that will impact the forestry sector into 2025 and beyond.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE UK BUDGET ON INHERITANCE TAX (IHT) ON FORESTRY?

Leigh Gould, private client partner at Brodies LLP

The UK Autumn Budget for 2024 made changes to IHT. For those people who have invested in forestry, this impacts on those investments by reducing Business Property Relief (BPR).

Currently, IHT is paid on death on the value of assets. The rate is 40%.

It has been possible to claim IHT relief on forestry and pass the asset on to the next generation without any IHT being payable, due to BPR (if it is available in the circumstances). The rate has effectively been 0%.

The rules for when BPR applies at all, have not changed. BPR has, however, been restricted and reduced. For deaths on or after 6 April 2026, it will be available but only up to a value of £1 million. That £1 million limit applies to all property claiming that relief and also includes any assets claiming agricultural property relief. The excess value over £1 million can only qualify for relief at 50%. Therefore, the value of qualifying assets over and above £1 million



MEET THE TEAM: (LtoR) Leigh Gould; Bob Langridge and Simon Boendermaker.

is taxed at an "effective rate" of 20%.

Moving from 0% tax to 20% tax will impact upon cashflow if someone dies, and upon the availability of resources to pay IHT without selling assets that a family wishes to keep.

The £1 million allowance is not transferrable between spouses; however wills could be reviewed and possibly re-written to use up two allowances.

It may be possible to take action before 6 April 2026. That might involve a gift of some (or all) of the property. Careful consideration is required beforehand – including any asset protection issues in passing ownership and control to heirs; the capital gains tax consequences of doing so; and if you can afford to give away the asset and the associated income.

It is likely that most people with business interests will need to revisit their wills and estate and succession planning to ascertain the impact of the changes. New plans may be required – this might involve lifetime giving to spread ownership more broadly among the family, or obtaining advice on the use of life assurance to cover the tax.

HOW WILL THE UK BUDGET CHANGES TO CAPITAL GAINS TAX AFFECT FORESTRY BUSINESSES?

Bob Langridge, corporate tax partner at Brodies LLP

Forestry as a business is unlikely to be heavily affected by the changes to capital gains tax (CGT), though there will be some

minor impacts.

- The main rate of CGT increased as of 30 October from 20% to 24%. This new rate effectively applies to all capital receipts except for payments of carried interest to fund managers.

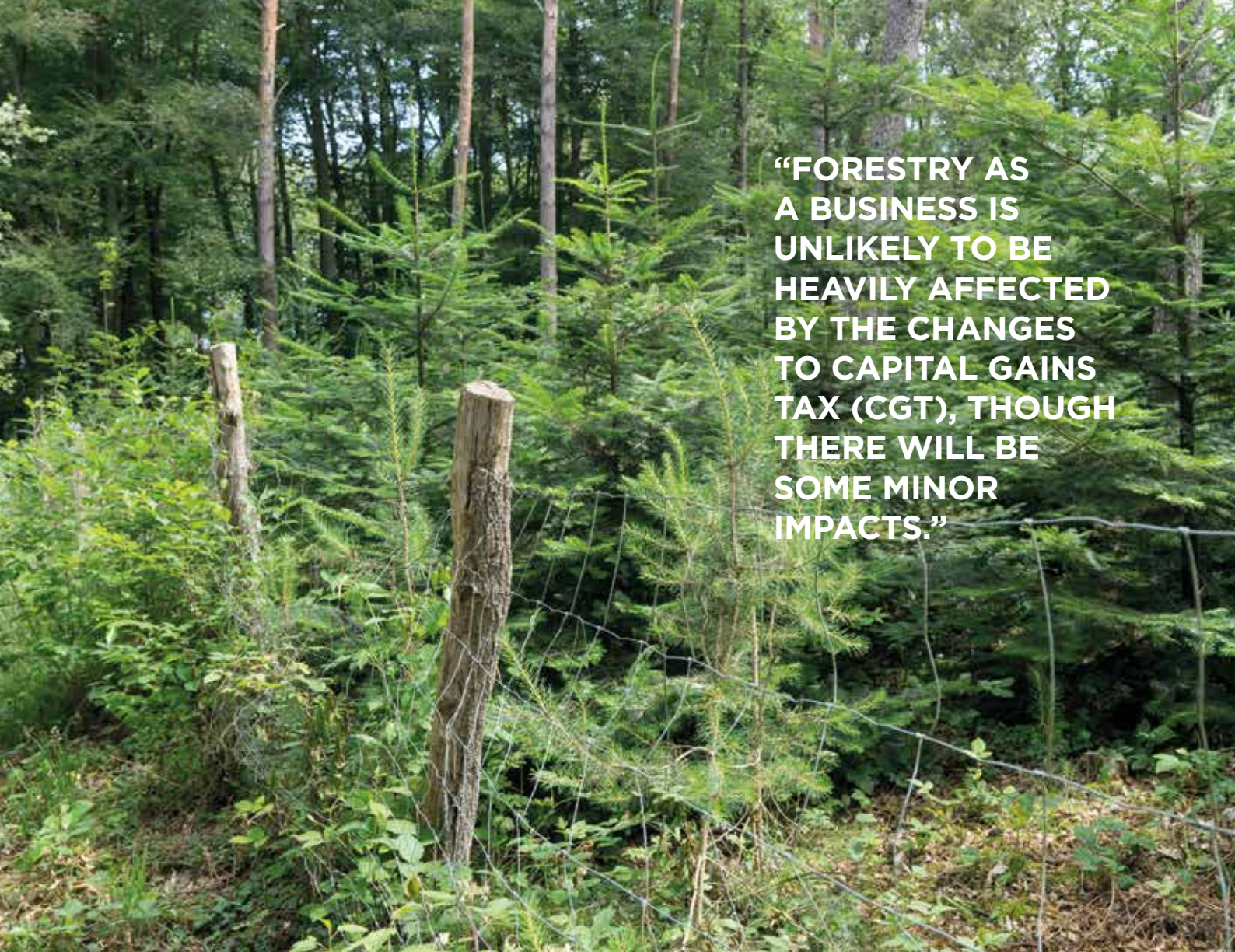
- However, the wider tax treatment for commercial woodlands remains intact. This means that on disposal of a commercially-operated forest, any standing and deadfall timber remains outside of CGT, and only the underlying land is subject to tax.

- Other capital assets and machinery used in commercial forestry will be subject to the higher rate of CGT, and without the ability to claim capital allowances against the initial expenditure.

- Rollover Reinvestment Relief is still available, which means that forestry businesses disposing of capital assets and forest sites can shelter some or all of their taxable gains by reinvesting the sale proceeds into new woodlands and assets. Provided the reinvestment is made in the one year before or three years after the date of the sale, relief should be available.

- There is no change to the CGT base cost uplift on death, meaning that any gains on inherited woodlands remain wiped out.

- While the rate of tax for businesses qualifying for business asset disposal relief (or BADR, the successor to Entrepreneurs' Relief) are increasing, this is of minimal impact to forestry. Most forestry businesses will not qualify for the relief: it is only available to activities which constitute a trade for income tax purposes and the "commercial occupation of woodlands" is spe-



“FORESTRY AS A BUSINESS IS UNLIKELY TO BE HEAVILY AFFECTED BY THE CHANGES TO CAPITAL GAINS TAX (CGT), THOUGH THERE WILL BE SOME MINOR IMPACTS.”

cifically excluded from the relevant definition of trade. Some businesses which comprise some forestry (but no more than 20%) alongside other activities may of course still qualify. The rate of CGT for disposals qualifying for BADR rose to 14% on 30 October 2024 and will rise again to 18% from April 2026.

WHAT DO LANDOWNERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE PLANNED UPGRADES TO THE ELECTRICITY GRID NETWORK - AND HOW WILL THEY IMPACT ON FORESTRY?

Simon Boendermaker, senior solicitor in real estate at Brodies LLP

This year we have seen an increase in landowners being approached to enter into option agreements, or in some cases being asked to directly grant wayleaves and title rights, to facilitate the development of power lines on their property. In Scotland, agreements will either be with SEN Transmission or Scottish Power Transmission, depending on the location of your property.

There are several considerations for landowners prior to entering into any such agreement. The most obvious point to

consider is the level of compensation that should be payable by the developer as it is extremely likely that felling will be required on the property to create the necessary “corridor” for the power line.

Felling may also be required to facilitate access to the development corridor, unless the developer is able to use existing access roads. If access can be taken using existing accesses, legal agreements should also include provisions to ensure forestry operations are not disrupted. This may mean agreeing protocols around the nature and timing of any access and maintenance provisions for any damage caused to access routes.

The key to agreeing the above points, alongside other protections that may be required, is for the landowner and their professional advisers to engage early with any approach to balance the landowner’s interests with the rights sought by the developer.

If the landowner does not engage on a consensual basis, the developer may fall back to the “necessary wayleave” process. This sets out a strict 21-day timescale in which to agree a voluntary agreement, failing which the developer can apply for Scottish Ministers to grant a “necessary wayleave”. These wayleaves will generally

reflect a developer’s standard terms and there may be costs associated with the application and process, which will not be met by the developer.

For those reasons, you should always engage with professional advisers immediately following an approach from a developer.

CONFOR MEMBERS FREE LEGAL CONSULTATION

Confor Members have access to a free legal helpline, administered by Brodies LLP. Get in touch for guidance on key issues that impact forest owners and the forestry sector.

Whether your query is employment law, health & safety, planning, tax or property-related, one of our experts will be happy to give you a free initial consultation. More info: <https://bit.ly/3yPGR11>

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SHAPING THE FUTURE OF GROWING TODAY

Back in October, the Horticultural Trades Association brought together an impressive lineup of cutting-edge technology demonstrations set to revolutionise productivity and sustainability in the horticultural industry at their first FutureGrow Expo.

Forest nurseries have been working at the forefront of many of these latest advancements in technology covering seed sowing, automated tree plug planting, non-chemical and camera guided weeding, self-propelled tree harvesting, optical tree grading and so much more.

Many of these developments have benefitted from the Defra Tree Production Innovation Fund, Tree Production Capital Grant and Seed Sourcing Grant which together seek to enhance the quantity, quality, and diversity of tree planting stock.

One of the speakers, Emilio Loo Monardez, Principal Engineer at Warwick Agritech, gave an enlightening talk on the challenges faced when commercialising new technologies and prototypes and how to avoid the Valley of Death.

From Agri-tech dreams to market realities

Agriculture is at the most challenging stage of its history due to climate change, economic vulnerability, political uncertainty and social patterns that hinder a sustainable supply chain; but also facing a window of opportunity for the develop-

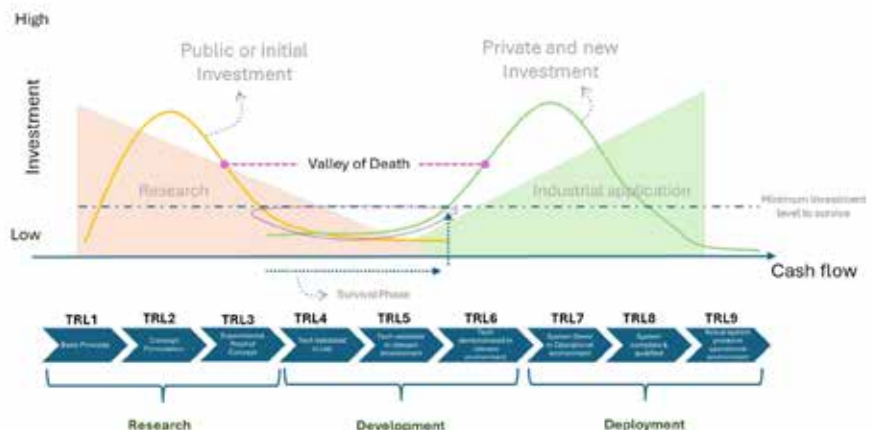


Figure 1: Valley of Death (VoD). Source: Warwick Agritech

ment of technologies (Agritech). However, embarking on the adventure of generating new innovations in an industry as complex and with such low initial margins as agriculture can be challenging and, in some cases, devastating due to the feared Valley of Death (VoD).

VoD is a critical phase where companies face their biggest financial challenges due to lack of cash flow and investment. This is a place of “scarcity, danger, pain

and unknown”. Although VoD is a financial stress, the causes go beyond investment or funding. These include poor technical capability and quality partner collaboration, low knowledge transfer and Technology Readiness Level (TRL) strength, and lack of business strategy.

Misalignment between investment level and cash flow can slow down progress as projects advance through TRLs. Poor cash flow between the initial investment and

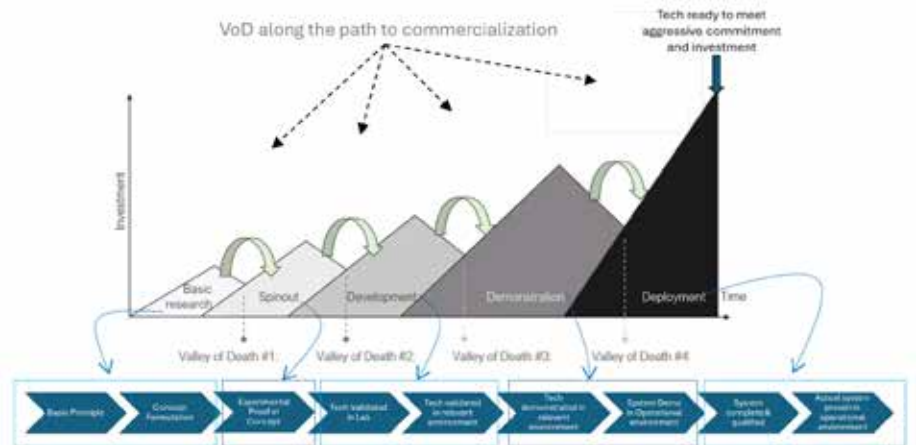


Figure 2: Multiple Valley of Death (VoD). Source: Adaptation from Wang H, Yee C. (2024)

new funding can freeze technological progress or expansion. (Figure 1)

Technology transfer from proof of concept (TRL 3) to development stages is one of the most important steps. Building, validating and demonstrating a prototype in a laboratory or relevant environment involves significant innovation and R&D.

Additional resources are required to demonstrate the prototype in an operational environment and failure to validate a prototype could affect future potential investment streams. A key threat is to fall into the survival stage, where lack of funding severely compromises the speed of technological development.

Although VoD has been described be-

tween TRL 4 and 6 due to its technical development relevance, there are other VODs on the path to commercialisation (Figure 2). Inadequate initial requirements can lead to poor results or inefficient technical iteration. Moving too quickly from proof of concept to prototype validation can lead to inefficient iterations, leaving the project without a convincing prototype needed to attract more investment.

To minimise the risk of failure and reduce the size of the VoDs, each stage of innovation includes an understanding of the technological iterations that add the most value, and the level of funding required. A good prototype will ultimately help to demonstrate the value of the technology and justify its ROI.

Figure 3 shows key elements to maximize success rate. Critical aspects include prioritising opportunities, accelerating innovation, and reducing investment risk. This helps understand a clear path to technical optimisation and commercial impact. Involvement of partners, steering board and investors from the outset helps the team understand quantitative and qualitative aspects, thus avoiding technical setbacks and loss of momentum.

A valuable relationship between the partners develops trust and transparency, contributing to a virtuous “win-win” environment, and reducing the risk of failing to satisfy project objectives. This holistic view finds different approaches for research to properly understand the market needs and define the achievable metrics.

Organisations such as the University of Warwick and High Value Manufacturing Catapult support companies from fundamental research to applied industrial applications in the agriculture sector. Together, they offer strong support from TRL 1-7:

- Transferring capabilities, technology and knowledge obtained in other industries towards the AgriTech industry.
- Transforming the production system for Agriculture and addressing overexploitation, climate change and pollution pressures.
- Introducing novel and cost-effective technologies in AgriTech capable to support productivity, efficiency and tackle sustainability aspects.
- Prioritise Opportunities, Accelerate Innovation and de-risk Investment helping engineering companies pivot towards agricultural technology.

With an expected global annual growth rate of 15% for the global Agritech market, projected to reach \$240 billion by 2050 (UK Department for International Trade), effective mechanisms are needed to support new AgriTech startups. This includes creating more effective technology accelerators, investor hubs and a regional technology network to support developments across TRLs.

R&D funding needs to be increased and collaboration encouraged across universities, Catapult and UK Agritech Centres.

Similarly, a new updated strategic vision is needed, aligning investment and challenges in agriculture with the UK’s industrial strategy.

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Key elements to maximise success

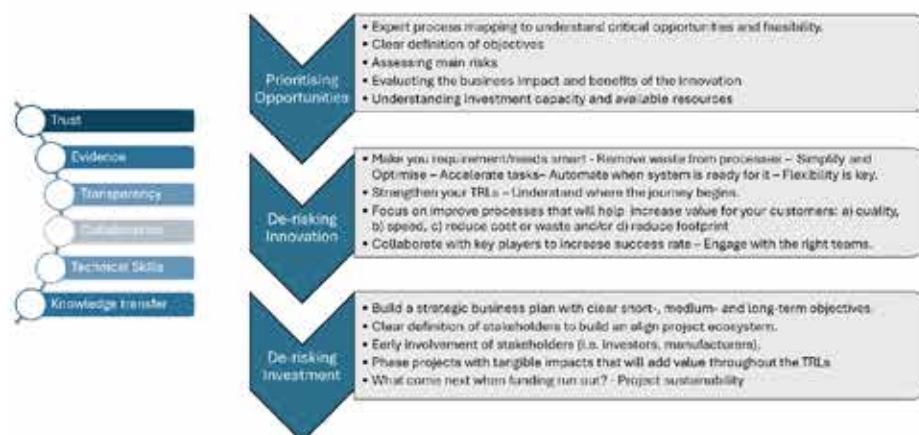


Figure 3: Elements to success across VoDs. Source: Warwick Agritech



Eamonn Wall gets behind the wheel of the latest Subaru Forester fitted with the e hybrid engine.

ECONOMICAL AND LIKABLE

Subaru's fifth generation, all-new Forester was launched a few years ago on a new platform shared with Subaru's other two petrol cars, the Legacy Outback and Crosstrek. Their electric ZBR sister car is just a slightly redressed Toyota.

The new hybrid engine is called the e-Boxer because it is based on Subaru's horizontally opposed four-cylinder petrol engine and such configured engines are often referred to as Boxers. The Porsche 911 is the only other car with such an engine. The e-Boxer has an electric motor and is combined with Subaru's symmetrical constant all-wheel drive system. New technologies also include Rear Vehicle Detection, Reverse Automatic Braking, and a Driver Monitoring System.

The Forester can tow 1,870kg and has a ground clearance of 220mm. The engine is a four-cylinder boxer with 1,995cc and is linked up to an automatic Lineartronic

gearbox which is basically a continuously variable gear gearbox. It has 150bhp and 196nm torque combined with an electric motor and small electric battery. No diesel versions are available.

A lithium-ion battery unit is mounted within the boot floor and allows for pure electric driving at speeds of up to 25mph. It can drive in full electric mode for distances of about a mile. This supposedly provides a 10% improvement in urban driving fuel consumption. In my hands the 40mpg was the average for the week.

At medium speeds the electric motor and engine work together to improve power and performance and improve towing and offroad driving. At higher speeds the car is driven solely by the engine and the engine will recharge the battery.

The Forester weighs around 1,685kg, is 4,640mm long, 2,065mm wide and 1,730mm high. The boot is a useful 509 litres and increases to 1,071 with the seats

folded. Acceleration is a leisurely 12 seconds to 60mph with a max speed of 117mph. The fuel tank is small at only 48 litres.

X-Mode is one of the systems standard on the car and can be used for added assistance if extreme driving conditions are encountered. X-Mode takes control of the engine, transmission, AWD system and brakes to help navigate slippery surfaces, rough roads and climbing steep hills. It uses the Hill Descent Control to maintain a constant speed going downhill.

Prices start at £37,995 for entry level model, £40,195 for the Sport, and £41,095 for top of the range Premium. Warranty is three years or a low 60,000 miles, with eight years for the battery.

The Forester is a pleasant car to drive. The suspension provides a comfortable ride, and the steering is nicely weighed. The brakes are good and the boot a reasonable size. It is not very fast and the



pure electric driving at very low crawling speeds provides a novel experience.

However, at motor speeds the car lacks power and to keep up 80mph the engine is straining. At 70mph the gearbox settles down and the car runs along smoothly but once you need extra speed the gearbox comes out of lock and the engine has to spin at higher revs to make progress. It never gets really noisy, but you can often hear the engine racing to help progress - so if you do a lot of motorway driving, this car is not for you.

The dashboard is a strange mix of screens and buttons. The windscreen is large, and the view forward is panoramic. The small wee angle windows to the front of the door windows add extra useful vision.

All in all, the Forester is a slightly strange car. However, it's one that is very practical with 4wd and some enhanced ground clearance; economical and likeable.



LONGTIME HEAD OF FORESTRY AND RESERVES STEPS DOWN AT CLINTON DEVON ESTATES

John Wilding MBE is handing over his role as Head of Forestry and Reserves to Rob Coventry, who has joined Clinton Devon Estates from a private forest management and consultancy business on the Wiltshire-Somerset border.

John was responsible for the management of the Clinton Devon Estates' 1,900 hectares (770 acres) of woodland, as well as overseeing the work of the National Nature Reserves Team on East Devon's Pebblebed Heaths and Otter Estuary. He also led on renewable energy projects and deputised for the Estate's Chief Executive, John Varley.

In 1997 John took on the management of a Forestry Team with six members of staff, an Estate sawmill and a variety of deer stalking arrangements. Over the next decade John used his experience as a timber harvesting manager to oversee the introduction of modern harvesting machinery to the Estate, increasing annual production and safety.

John's focus on site assessment, productive species selection and exceptional restock management has left a very well stocked forest estate which will bear substantial fruit over the subsequent decades.

He says he has witnessed significant changes during more than 40 years in forestry and during the last decade has pioneered a major development in silvicultural strategy at the Estate, moving away from the conventional clear fell restock

system, to single-tree selection silviculture.

The change promotes development of natural forest structure and function with different species at different ages in the same block of woodland. It drives timber quality, biodiversity, and builds resilience against disease and the impact of climate change.

In 2011, John was appointed a member of the Government's Forestry Regulation Review. In the same year John received an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) for outstanding services to the environment in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

John paid tribute to the skills and hard work of his colleagues in the Forestry and Reserves Team and to the Clinton family and Estate Trustees for their willingness to change course in the way the woodlands are managed to meet changing environmental circumstances.

"I will miss the people I have worked with," he said. "It's a great team and the Estate, the family and the trustees have always shown a good and forward-thinking philosophy, which has made it a pleasure to work here." John worked closely with the late Lord Clinton, who passed away in April and who always took a deep interest in forestry.

John plans to keep busy in retirement. He is a keen country sportsman, with a particular interest in game-fishing and also enjoys riding his motorcycle. He said: "I



John Wilding and Rob Coventry

have got a lot of interests and an expanding family with grandchildren arriving in the last couple of years. I am well aware that life is not a rehearsal - and I plan to live it!"

RECOGNITION OF A 60-YEAR CAREER

Those of you who have watched Clarkson's Farm will know the character Gerald whose rural Oxfordshire accent gives Jeremy Clarkson such trouble. We at Fasque Forestry have a similar character - Bob Burr.

Like Gerald, Bob has been working for a long time. It's difficult to pin down exactly when Bob started; he has so many stories that he might start with one and finish with another.

Bob's Doric (Dialect of Scots English) gives many people, even those born and brought up in the Aberdeenshire area, some trouble. I've caught many truck drivers from elsewhere smiling and nodding as Bob explains something. Evidently, they were not catching all he was saying.

I know he started work in forestry in 1964, and before that he was a farmhand.



Today he is still throwing out an 8-to-10-hour shift on our trusty John Deere 1110 forwarder, mostly six days a week. This coming year he will be 77 and he is keen to continue with us, or at least with the forwarder.

Bob started working when horses and axes were common. He has driven all

manner of tractors including, as expected, Fordson Majors and County Highland Bears, both of which I remember as being old machines when I started in the 1980s. I know he has worked all over the UK and in Europe; France seemed to be a place he really liked. Now we keep him close to home, where we can.

I'm sure Bob will be working with us for a few more years yet, he enjoys the job too much. In our industry it's common for senior people to be recognised, but a forwarder driver - well there's nothing for him. That fact prompted me to write this short article, and Confor generously offered to publish.

We will reward Bob for his long service ourselves, but I would argue that people like Bob have played a significant role in the forestry industry, and it would be nice if this were widely recognised.

EXPERIMENTAL FUNGI TRANSLOCATION AIMS TO RESTORE NATURE BENEATH THE SOIL IN YORKSHIRE WOODLAND

In the month of UN World Soil Day, Forestry England have launched a pilot project transplanting soil from an ancient forest to a nearby community woodland in an effort to introduce essential fungal benefits into the ecosystem.

Forestry England is carrying out an experiment in nature restoration, moving soil rich in vital fungi from an ancient woodland to a newly planted site in North Yorkshire. This innovative approach aims to restore missing species crucial for healthy tree growth and soil sustainability and could pave the way for the method to be used across the nation's forests.

The pilot project involves Forestry England ecologists carefully extracting soil 'cores' from Hagg Wood, east of York, and transplanting them to York Community Woodland nine miles away. Each core contains up to 300 different species of fungi that are invisible to the naked eye but essential for woodland health.

Forestry England is working in partnership with City of York Council, creating and caring for York Community Woodland. It is on 78 hectares of land bought by the council for woodland creation to boost biodiversity and increase health and wellbeing opportunities for city residents and visitors.

The translocation project targets mycorrhizal fungi, which form symbiotic relationships with trees, providing them with water and nutrients in exchange for carbon. Their presence indicates the woodland ecosystem they live in is healthy and resilient. Forestry England's environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling has revealed that they are missing from many newly planted woodlands and those created in the last century.

Andrew Stringer, Head of Environment at Forestry England, said: "The hundreds of individual mycorrhizal fungal species form a vast community in the soil, helping our trees grow and be healthy. The soil in ancient woodlands is rich in these fungi because they have had hundreds of years undisturbed by artificial fertilisers or other land management activities that break up soil and deplete them.

"Fungi can provide an immune system helping trees cope with diseases. They can also support them to stay resilient to extreme weather including drought and flooding which in our changing climate are now more likely threats facing woodlands and forests.

"Soil translocation experiments for nature restoration have been tried in different forest settings across several countries but this is a first for Forestry England. We simply don't know if it will work. The fungi may not successfully colonise in their new home, and we will closely track changes beneath the soil through eDNA sampling for the next 10 years to get a true picture. But the potential for us is enormous.

"We estimate that more than half the nation's forests, an area of 140,000 hectares, are potentially missing these species. Our hope is that this technique becomes another important tool in the nature restoration toolkit we can use to restore more fully functioning ecosystems in all the woodlands and forests in our care."

Forestry England has planted more than 190,000 trees at York Community

Woodland, the test bed for the fungi translocation experiment. The woodland opened to visitors in August and as well as offering a beautiful, wildlife-rich green space for people to explore and enjoy, will help nature recover across the wider landscape, providing valuable habitat, storing carbon, alleviating soil erosion and preventing flooding.

Forestry England's ecologists have followed strict biosecurity measures for the translocation, with a short transfer distance between the two sites, and no signs of tree disease present at Hagg Wood, where the soil cores have been taken from.

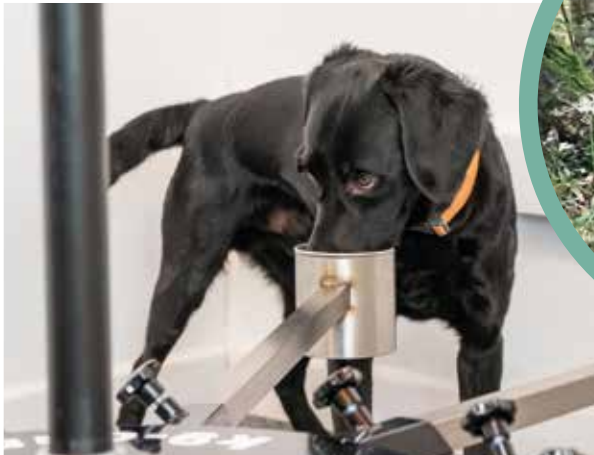
Forestry England is working with biotechnology company NatureMetrics to monitor the project's success by regularly taking soil samples and analysing eDNA. The organisation will share the data gathered from the experiment, contributing to the existing body of knowledge on woodland ecosystem restoration and management.

The translocation took place in the run up to UN World Soil Day, held annually on 5 December to focus attention on the importance of healthy soils.





This rare sighting of an albino red squirrel was sent in by Alan Lawson. The photo was taken by a friend; 'Snowy' will certainly blend in if Perthshire sees a white Christmas!



In collaboration with Forest Research, Canine Assisted Pest Eradication has successfully trained Ivor, a six-year-old cocker spaniel x labrador (pictured), to successfully identify the deadly tree pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum*. Ivor can successfully identify the disease in soil, plant material and sterile distilled water. His training has even helped him distinguish *Phytophthora ramorum* from the scent of other *Phytophthora* species.
 Photo credit: Dr Heather Dun

Want to see your picture here?

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Photos should relate to forestry and timber and be of high-quality (minimum resolution 300dpi). Exceptional pictures might be considered for the front cover of a future FTN issue.

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COMING UP IN FEB 24 / MAR 25 - GET INVOLVED

In our February/March issue we will be focusing on Woodland Management & Business Diversification. Remember that FTN is your magazine – get in touch if you want to suggest editorial or give us feedback on articles we have published in the past. Confor members, send us your company's news updates or pitches for feature articles.

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