

Views sought on future of woods as Government seeks to boost tree planting

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Increasing and protecting forests will be an integral part of the pandemic recovery, the Government said as it launched a consultation on a new tree strategy.

The strategy will set out policies to expand tree cover in England, support woodland management, boost the economy and increase public engagement with trees and woods, the Environment Department (Defra) said.

It aims to help the Government meet its target to plant 30,000 hectares of new woodland (74,000 acres) a year across the UK by 2025, which is needed to tackle climate change.

The Government is seeking views from farmers, forest managers, experts, environmental groups and members of the public on the design of the strategy.

The consultation is asking for views on areas such as stronger protections for ancient woodlands, grants with simple application processes for farmers and landowners to create new woods, and boosting the capacity of UK tree nurseries.

It will also look at how community forests could be supported to create new woodlands near where people live, and towns and cities could get more trees and other “green infrastructure” to make them attractive places to live.



Landowners, the forestry industry, environment groups and the public are being invited to give their views on woods (Forestry Commission/PA)

Measures to support the economy could include increasing the use of domestic forest products including timber and biomass for energy and designing grants and a clear policy to boost agroforestry – which integrates trees with farming.

The strategy will be used to inform how part of the £640 million “nature for climate fund” announced by the Treasury in the Budget in March will be spent to deliver on tree planting commitments.

Forestry minister Lord Goldsmith said: “In many ways the coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on the importance of nature.

“Growing and protecting our nation’s forests will be an integral part of our recovery, and the England tree strategy will give us the tools to do this.

“This consultation will help inform a keystone strategy which will be vital for helping us deliver the Government’s tree planting commitment, our commitment to the recovery of nature and reaching net-zero emissions by 2050.

“But we need input from the sector and public. I encourage everyone to give their views to design a tree strategy that delivers the maximum benefits for our environment for generations to come.”



The strategy could help boost sustainable forestry (Forestry Commission/PA)

The Woodland Trust, National Trust and The Rivers Trust set out a series of tests they say the final strategy, which will be drawn up following the consultation, must meet.

They say it must deliver new woodlands, including native woods, scrub, farmland planting and hedgerows, with targets for quality not just quantity, and protect and restore existing woods and the wildlife in them.

It must connect people with trees, for example through the Northern Forest which is planting woodland across an area from Liverpool to Hull, and protect street trees, the groups said.

And it must support the woodland economy and make sure there is funding to make the strategy happen, the environmental groups said.

Darren Moorcroft, chief executive of the Woodland Trust, said: “The England tree strategy needs to deliver for nature, climate and people.

“It must set out how trees will help us cut carbon, support nature and wildlife, and contribute to better and more resilient landscapes and places to live and work.

“That means not just more trees in the ground, but planning expansion in a joined up way and doing much more to look after the trees and woods we already have.

“Protecting, restoring and expanding native tree cover – with all the social, economic and environmental benefits that will bring – belongs at the heart of any ‘green recovery’.

“We welcome the consultation as a first step toward that vision.”

Source: <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2020/06/18/views-sought-on-future-of-woods-as-government-seeks-to-boost-tree-planting/>