

England Tree Strategy

Policy Discussion Document from the LI

Foreword

The England Tree Strategy (ETS) is a huge opportunity to show that trees and woods are not one-dimensional carbon sinks but a key part of landscapes, forming nature recovery networks and delivering for people, place and nature in towns and cities.

There is much in the ETS that is very positive. We support the essential design principles underpinning this work, most especially that public money should be spent on delivering public goods.

The ETS comes at a vital time, we are facing a dual climate and biodiversity crisis. The science has been abundantly clear: action is needed immediately on both climate and biodiversity. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that in order to keep the rise in global temperatures below 1.5C this century, emissions of carbon dioxide would have to be cut by 45% by 2030. Just as critically, we must also take action on halting the decline of biological diversity: both as an objective in its own right, and to prevent further ecosystem collapse. In 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) showed that up to one million species could be lost in coming decades, more than ever before in human history. In the UK we are already seeing the effects: more than two-fifths of UK species have experienced significant decline in recent decades.

For the England Tree Strategy to be successful it will need to deliver for both climate and biodiversity. The climatic imperative can make it tempting to plant huge swathes of fast-growing species and whilst this has a role to play there must be focus on planting at **Landscape Scale**. Involving landscape professionals early in the process can ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places delivering mosaics of nature-rich landscapes and resilient, functioning ecosystems.

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1 About Us

The Landscape Institute (LI) is the royal chartered body for the landscape profession. As a professional organisation and educational charity, we work to protect, conserve and enhance the built and natural environment for the public benefit. The LI represents around 5500 landscape managers and landscape architects, including related professions including urban designers, parks managers, scientists and planners, working across urban and rural areas.

Trees are a central piece of much of many of the places our members design and create. Trees form a critical component of green infrastructure (GI) and provide a wide range of ecosystem services to urban dwellers. In rural settings landscape professionals work to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places. Landscape professional's sensitivity and understanding of natural and historic landscapes benefits clients in both rural and urban locations. Landscape professionals are experts in merging the built and natural environments, working to plant native, adaptive trees in communities and places across the nation.

We have consulted closely with our members many of whom are closely involved in the design, development and management of woodlands across the U.K. We would welcome further discussion with DEFRA through which we can create internal working groups to provide expertise and evidence.

2 Key principles

An England Tree Strategy which expands, connects, restores, and protects our trees and woodlands is a tantalising prospect. The Woodland Trust will be challenging government to develop a strategy that delivers all of this. We will engage our members and supporters across the country and hope to work with others in the conservation sector to help make it a reality.

Our Key Principles that the ETS should deliver:

1. Deliver woodlands and forests at a landscape-scale using a more sophisticated and landscape-led approach to planting. Such an approach can provide the value that woodlands can provide for people place and nature. Planted strategically woodlands can reduce flood risks, increase biodiversity and provide for recreation.
2. The new scheme(s) must have the ambition to capture broader concepts- better more connected forests and woodlands with nature recovery at the heart of planting- the strategy must be about more than just numbers.
3. Putting landscape professionals central- and early in the process. Utilising the skills of landscape professionals early can ensure that the right trees are planted in the rights places delivering mosaics of nature-rich landscapes and resilient, functioning ecosystems.
4. Embed the strategy within wider government frameworks such as planning, development ELMS and infrastructure delivery.
5. Delivery must have a stronger focus on urban trees and the huge benefits they can deliver for cities and towns.

2.1 Landscape Led Approach to Planting

The England Tree Strategy should seek to use a landscape-scale approach to tree planting, woodland creation and management, which gives consideration to the interface between trees, forests and other land uses, and delivers the benefits of wider public goods which strategically placed woodland can yield. Landscape scale delivery has been shown to be effective in several models, including Nature Improvement Areas, catchment partnerships, National Character Areas and designated landscape partnerships. Landscape-led planting also uses *evidence and local understanding of a landscape's distinctiveness ensures new planting is characteristic, maintaining local distinctiveness in terms of patterns and species, but also in terms of function.*

The ETS must also review the effectiveness of woodland and green space networks in combating the effects of climate change and increase their resilience to further change, for example by aiming for less fragmentation and more diversity at the landscape scale, in terms of habitat structure, species composition and genetics.

2.2 Delivery: More than just numbers

We welcome the government commitment to 30,000ha of new woodland in England by 2025 this must and can be met. With the right funding and delivery mechanisms we can ensure that quality not just quantity are created. Working at a landscape-scale the objective must be to create mosaics of biodiverse habitats which provide for carbon storage, landscape character and health and wellbeing benefits. Strategically planted woodland can form the basis of nature recovery networks and ensure that our

forests and woodlands are better connected. Targets for native woodland planting, hedgerow numbers and natural restoration must be part of the ETS. Following on from planting management and maintenance of these woodlands is just as important. Managing our tree stock & woodland is critical to ensuring that they maximise public benefits including carbon sequestration.

2.3 Using landscape skills for planting

It's clear that skills and expertise are in urgent need in this sector. With such large skill shortages in the sector and equally ambitious targets for delivery the ETS must consider working with professional bodies to deliver skills workshops and CPD. This has been an effective measure in the past with the Landscape Institute collaborating with MCHLG to deliver a vision for new park management.

Landscape professionals have an important skillset in the creation of new forests and woodlands but also in management of existing and nascent stocks. If involved early in a project, landscape professionals have the skills to create woodland that is sensitive to the sites cultural, ecological and landscape significance. Master-planning at this stage can ensure that trees and woodland cover can enhance both natural and cultural value delivering multiple benefits for people, place and nature.

Landscape practitioners involved in schemes can also aid in appropriate species selection, soil requirements, drainage design and biosecurity measures. These are important in both the designing phase and maintenance.

2.4 Joined up approach for planting delivery

Given the direction of travel across government towards a greener more climate resilient nation the ETS must be embedded and empowered across government departments and levers. If the government wants to achieve its manifesto and policy objectives in terms of tree planting, planning and associated policies will need to be a major contributor to increasing planting levels. Requiring all local authorities to create and adopt a localised tree strategy is an important step change that could radically increase the delivery of urban and rural planting. The Community Infrastructure Levy has been a key support of developing local areas, it's potential replacement in the planning white paper should include measures to create new woodland areas cross-boundary forests or green spaces.

The new biodiversity net gain development (BNG) approach can be a real driver of planting if they adequately reflect the importance of trees, existing/newly planted trees in the in the ground. BNG can also be an important tool in ensuring not just quantity but quality of trees is of an adequate standard in terms of biodiversity gain. More broadly government infrastructure funding must consider tree planting whether rural or urban a part of infrastructure, green infrastructure akin to engineering roadways. As part of a green recovery there are many shovel-ready and worthy proposals for woodland creation that could form part of any infrastructure investment.

Finally, the forthcoming Environmental Land Management Schemes should be considered a vital part of any ETS delivery. Tier 1 of countryside stewardship must include a broad forestry, agroforestry and management in its scope. Putting this area in Tier one will make it more accessible particularly for land managers with small holdings, where relatively simple interventions (such as stock exclusion, edge and ride management, etc.) can make a big difference. This can start a drive towards the governments ambitious tree targets. Many schemes may be generated by landowners currently there isn't any plan or logic to these placements working at a landscape scale within ELMS can help deliver these in the appropriate manner.

2.5 Deliver Urban Forests

The weighting given to the different component parts of England’s tree and woodland assets, as currently reflected by the CD structure, is not sufficiently balanced to provide adequately for the different services that they can deliver.

The urban forest receives little attention, yet about 83% of the population in England lives in urban areas. Research shows strong associations between higher levels of urban canopy cover and significantly enhanced public health outcomes.

There is also very robust evidence of the critical importance of trees in creating climate-resilient towns and cities, in enabling an increased uptake of sustainable travel, as well as in enhancing quality of place around both existing and new homes (making higher densities more liveable, and new homes more acceptable).

The maintenance of the urban forest requires thorough consideration within the ETS and whilst the LI supports the important planting and creation of street trees and urban forests the ETS should not overlook the ongoing burden of maintenance associated with existing trees. The consultation calls for views into how this should be funded, the replacement for the Community Infrastructure Levy in the ongoing planning reforms could prove an important mechanism in maintaining street trees.

3 Useful links

Construction Industry Council

<http://cic.org.uk/publications/>

Contribution of trees to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services in agricultural landscapes, International Journal of Biodiversity Science, Ecosystem Services & Management

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21513732.2017.1399167>

England Tree Strategy must deliver for climate, nature and people

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/press-centre/2020/06/england-tree-strategy/>

Making Way for Trees? Changes in Land-Use, Habitats and Protected Areas in Great Britain under “Global Tree Restoration Potential”

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/14/5845>

The England Tree Strategy – a new start?

<https://www.wcl.org.uk/england-tree-strategy-blog.asp>