

Forestry Commission Chair welcomes new England Trees Action Plan to treble tree planting rates in England

Today (Tuesday 18 May) the Forestry Commission has welcomed a new government commitment to protect, enhance and restore nature and help meet Net Zero by 2050, using nature-based solutions to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis, including new commitments for tree planting and tree health in England. This builds on the recommendations of the Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity.

Launched today during a landmark speech by the Environment Secretary George Eustice, the England Trees Action Plan (ETAP) will aim to at least treble tree planting rates in England by the end of this Parliament, reflecting England's contribution to meeting the UK's overall target of planting 30,000 hectares per year by the end of this Parliament.

As the government's expert forestry advisors and custodians of the nation's forests, the Forestry Commission will be a key delivery partner in meeting this ambition.

Also speaking today, the Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley announced a new flagship grant scheme – the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO). The new scheme for farmers and landowners will support the creation of a range of woodland types and sizes, including through natural colonisation, and especially where their location and design will provide public benefits.

The offer will be open to applications of small areas of land from 1 hectare upwards, providing greater incentives for farmers and landowners to consider tree planting as a sustainable option. The grant is due to launch soon and particularly incentivises the creation of new native woodland, especially where this extends existing priority woodlands or benefits water habitats by planting along rivers, or provides recreational access to the public.

The ETAP will provide a raft of new measures to boost tree planting and establishment including an enhanced role for private finance, improving woodland management in England, supporting a thriving green economy and bringing trees closer to people.

Supported by over £500m from the Nature for Climate Fund between 2020 and 2025, this is a once in a generation plan to help achieve this vision.

Speaking today at Delamere Forest, Forestry Commission

Chair, Sir William Worsley, said:

It is crucial that we act now to ensure that we leave our environment in a better state for future generations. We need to work towards net zero emissions by 2050; to address biodiversity loss; to better connect people with nature; and to create more green jobs in doing so. Trees are central to the Government's plans to achieve this, and it is through the ambitious programme of activity set out in the England Trees Action Plan – supported by £500m from the Nature for Climate Fund – that we can realise these huge objectives.

Sara Lom, CEO, The Tree Council said:

2021 is a pivotal moment for trees and for our planet. The Tree Council welcomes the England Trees Action Plan as a strong roadmap for ambitious action to plant, care for and protect the trees and hedgerows which gladden our towns, cities and countryside. By trebling tree planting rates in England, this Action Plan will support trees' vital role in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises which threaten our landscapes and our livelihoods.

The Action Plan will help see an unprecedented number of trees planted, protected and managed to deliver more for society, nature, the climate and the economy, through:

- The England Woodland Creation Offer – a major new woodland creation grant to create over 10,000 hectares of new woodland over the lifetime of the grant. The grant will provide both greater financial incentives to plant and maintain trees and offer greater recognition of the benefits provided by woodland to people and nature. More guidance on eligibility and the application process will follow.
- Extending the Urban Trees Challenge Fund, providing further investment to support the planting and establishment of trees in urban areas.
- Providing additional funding as part of the Local Authority Treescape Fund to plant trees outside of woodlands for the benefit of local communities.
- Expanding the size of the nation's forests by working with public and private land owners to create new woodlands under Forestry England's management.
- Creating at least three new Community Forests providing greater public access to woodlands where they are needed most.

Biosecurity is central to protecting both the Government's significant investment in tree planting, ensuring our trees and woodlands are protected in the long term. In addition to the action plan, we will be introducing a three-year tree health pilot scheme to build the resilience of England's trees, woods and forests and to enhance the benefits trees provide, by

mitigating and minimising the impact of pests and diseases. This builds on the elements being introduced in the action plan to expand the tree health grants provided to treat or fell diseased trees and to restock following a tree health issue.

The Nature For Climate fund will help us deliver the English portion of the government's manifesto commitment to increase tree planting to 30,000 hectares per year across the UK by 2025, alongside peatland restoration and nature recovery.