

Forestry Minister David Rutley in Northumberland

First of all I would like to thank Egger for hosting us all this morning. This government is truly committed to the future of our forests and woodlands, recognising their importance to society and the natural world and in the fight against climate change.

Forestry already plays a very important role in Northumberland and I see it playing a central part in the fight against climate change as echoed in our future ambitions to plant trees.

I view an integral part of today's programme is how we work together with stakeholders to shape the plans for the future for tree planting. Partnership working in Northumberland is key to this endeavour.

We all have to seize the opportunity. This is a unique moment and we have to act now and respond to the climate change emergency.

As my Right Honourable Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment, stated in his speech earlier this week, time is running out for the environment if we continue in the way that we are, and it is indeed, later than we all think.

The United Kingdom is now among the most nature-depleted nations in the world. The factors driving these losses are various and inter-connected: urbanisation, unsustainable agricultural intensification, deforestation, water stress, pollution and, of course, climate change.

The new Environment Bill will set the direction for environmental improvements in this country for decades to come to help leave the environment in a better state than we found it. The Bill will take a coordinated approach to the environment.

The Bill will specifically address tree planting in England. Environmental Land Management contracts, for example, will fund the planting of millions of trees in this country

As I mentioned climate change is one of the most urgent and pressing challenges we face today. But, late as it may be, there is still time.

The UK Government is committed to addressing it, which is why the Prime Minister announced last month that the UK will eradicate its net contribution to climate change by 2050. The UK is a world-leader in tackling this global challenge, being the first country to raise climate change on the international stage, introduce long-term legally-binding carbon reduction targets and cutting emissions further than all other G20 countries.

Tree planting is increasingly recognised as an effective way to reduce net emissions and respond to the climate emergency. Forests are not only a carbon

sink, but help with preventing the erosion of soils, and reducing flood risks, whilst also providing us with fantastic recreational spaces. A great example of this is Kielder Forest, which at 250 square miles is England's largest forest.

We are already accelerating the rate of tree planting in England, recognising that our woodlands and forests, street trees and parklands help create healthier places for us to work and live.

The Government has committed to planting 11 million trees this parliament, with over 3.5 million trees planted to date, and over 15 million trees planted since 2010; whilst our longer-term aspiration is to increase woodland cover in England from 10 to 12 per cent.

I strongly believe that we must raise our level of ambition and plant more trees: we need to go a lot further and I see Northumberland playing an integral part of this.

We've kick-started a vast Northern Forest which will see 50 million trees planted from Liverpool to Hull – and are working with local authorities to prevent unnecessary tree felling.

We have also established the Woodland Carbon Guarantee fund which will provide £50 million to encourage large-scale afforestation in this country; and, as part of our Year of Green Action plan, we have allocated £10 million to plant 130,000 new trees in urban areas, including 20,000 valuable street trees through the urban trees challenge fund, which will also help meet the government's target to plant one million urban trees by 2022.

We have established the first pilot Forestry Investment Zone in Cumbria, driving large-scale planting, and I know many are keen to set up another here in Northumberland. This is where partnership work will be key to explore these future tree planting opportunities. There is already a great example of large tree planting, thanks to government funding, in Doddington North Moor where more than 600,000 will be planted.

We have also recently re-appointed our national Tree Champion (Sir William Worsley) to drive forward planting rates but we recognise that we need to go further – and faster

At this critical time, with public pressure mounting for environmental action both on climate change and biodiversity, we are currently developing an English Tree Strategy. This strategy will set how out we wish to accelerate woodland creation in this country and to deliver the level of afforestation required to reach net zero by 2050. In fact, straight after this speech, I am meeting with stakeholders to discuss the strategy in more detail.

Thank you.