

New Tree Health Pilot to launch this summer

The Government has today launched plans to provide grants to land managers – including farmers – to take action against tree pests and diseases which attack our trees, woods and forests.

Owners and managers of trees and woodlands in England are being encouraged to take part in the pilot of the Tree Health Scheme which starts in August.

Measures will include biosecure felling and treatment of diseased or infested trees. The scheme will also support the restocking and maintenance of newly re-planted trees following a pest or disease outbreak. Plants and trees deliver £10.5 billion per year in social, environmental and economic benefits, so reducing pest and disease risks is crucial to protecting these vital national assets.

The pilot will last for three years and, following scrupulous testing and final revisions, the new scheme will fully roll out in 2024. Details of the pilot will be published in the summer ahead of applications opening at the end of August 2021.

The pilot delivers on the Government's commitment – set out in the Agricultural Transition Plan – to reduce the impact of tree pests and disease. It will work alongside landmark plans for a renewed agricultural sector which will transform the way farmers and land managers are supported to encourage sustainable farming practices alongside profitable food production. The plans include new schemes to reward farmers and land managers for producing public goods such as better air and water quality, thriving wildlife, soil health, or measures to reduce flooding and tackle the effects of climate change.

As set out in the Agricultural Transition Plan, the new Tree Health Scheme will expand upon the current support available via the Countryside Stewardship Tree Health grants.

Prof Nicola Spence, the UK's Chief Plant Health Officer, said:

Trees provide huge benefits to our economy, society and the environment – from protecting vulnerable wildlife and acting as carbon storage to enabling a sustainable timber industry.

That's why it is crucial that collectively we look after our woodland and forests. I hope all those who are eligible will apply to the pilot this summer. They will play a critical role in supporting the design of future policies for the benefit of both our environment and valuable industries.

The pilot will be looking to trial new elements of the future scheme through 100 agreements with woodland owners and land managers in London, the South East, the North West and West Midlands. Applicants will need to have an eligible tree pest or disease confirmed on their land by the Forestry Commission, which will run the scheme.

Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley said:

I urge eligible land owners and farmers to look into applying to take part in the Tree Health Scheme's pilot. A healthy treescape is crucial to ensure that we leave our environment in a better state for future generations and for us to reaching our net zero by 2050 goals. Trees are central to the government's plans to achieve this and participation in this new scheme is a significant step towards achieving these ambitions.

The pilot will work alongside the existing Countryside Stewardship Woodland Tree Health grants, which will continue to be on offer until 2024 when the new Tree Health Scheme will be adopted. As the pilot will trial new elements of the future scheme only, payments made as part of the Tree Health pilot will differ to payments made as part of the existing Countryside Stewardship Tree Health grants.

The Tree Health Scheme also supports the commitment to the 25 Year Environment Plan, the Environmental Goals of the Tree Health Resilience Strategy and the UK's carbon net zero goals.