

# [News story: Network Rail vegetation management: Chair appointment and terms of reference](#)

Rail Minister Jo Johnson has today (12 July 2018) announced the appointment of John Varley OBE TD to chair the review of Network Rail's approach to vegetation management in England and Wales.

John Varley, who is currently the director of Clinton Devon Estates, will take up the post with immediate effect.

The [review was launched by the Rail Minister on 10 May](#) to consider how Network Rail can best ensure the safety of our railways, while also protecting wildlife and preserving trees. The full terms of reference have also been published today.

In his role at Clinton Devon Estates, John oversees the management of 10,000 hectares of land across East and North Devon, covering a range of operations, including farming, forestry and the maintenance of residential and commercial assets.

He previously served as an independent member advising the government during the Lawton Review, [Making space for nature](#), in 2010. He was subsequently appointed to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Independent Forestry Panel in 2011, and appointed as a judge on the government's Nature Improvement Area Competition Panel. He is also a non-executive board member to the Environment Agency and Natural England, and is the current Chair to the Estates Business Group.

The review will consider all aspects of Network Rail's approach to vegetation management, including:

- The rationale, evidence base and effectiveness of Network Rail's existing policy for managing vegetation – in particular, how environmental considerations are taken into account in the context of government's ambition for the natural environment and its statutory duties for health and safety and its wider responsibilities for maintaining and enhancing network performance, delivering improved services to passengers (eg through improved mobile connectivity), and for ensuring value for money
- The effectiveness of Network Rail's implementation of their existing vegetation management policy, and an options appraisal of alternative policies/models
- Identification of where best practice already exists, and whether best practice can be implemented more effectively on other parts of the network, taking into account route devolution
- Network Rail's capacity and capability and that of its supply chain, and whether this is adequate to control vegetation in a way that

strategically identifies and optimises opportunities to enhance wildlife and the natural environment both within the existing Network Rail footprint, and supports broader landscape scale initiatives of third parties

- Staff training, including of third parties and whether more skills are needed to identify alternative approaches to current felling practises; and where possible, scope for technological innovation eg improvements in adhesion management
- Network Rail's ability to monitor and account for the number of trees felled and replaced, in the context of wider national biodiversity objectives, and how this can be aligned with best practice for environmental reporting
- Network Rail's handling of communications to and from the public
- The extent of any recent or proposed changes in the scale or scope of the programme and underlying drivers

The review will not cover Network Rail's activities in Scotland, which are a devolved matter for the Scottish Government.