

Press release: Tree Champion to expand England's woodland

A new Tree Champion to drive forward planting rates and prevent the unnecessary felling of street trees has been appointed today by Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

Sir William Worsley, current Chair of the National Forest Company, has been tasked with setting a bold direction for the country's forests and woodlands over the next 25 years and supporting the Government's manifesto commitments to plant 11 million trees, plus a further one million in our towns and cities.

Alongside the Government's [recently-launched review into National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#), the Champion will help to improve the environment for the next generation and make the ambitions of our [25 Year Environment Plan](#) a reality.

He will bring together mayors, city leaders and other key players across local government to prevent the unnecessary felling of street trees – alongside supporting the introduction of a new duty for councils to properly consult with communities before they cut down trees.

With a number of grant schemes already in place to help landowners grow woodland cover, the Tree Champion will support the development of a future scheme outside the EU – one that encourages large-scale tree planting, reduces carbon and rewards landowners for enhancing the environment.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

We have a responsibility to make sure the next generation inherit the woodlands, forests and trees they deserve. We are beginning to see good progress in growing tree cover, but we need to go further – and faster.

I'm confident Sir William Worsley will bring the expertise and vision required to rapidly drive forward planting rates and prevent street trees being felled.

As Chair of the National Forest Company, Sir William Worsley currently oversees the successful National Forest – which has transformed 200 square miles of industrial land in the heart of England and now attracts over eight million visitors a year – helping wildlife like otters, water voles and dragonflies to flourish.

Sir William Worsley said:

I am delighted to be appointed as the Government's Tree Champion. Trees and woods are an important part of my life, as they are to local communities. They transform our landscapes, improve our health and wellbeing and help grow the economy.

I look forward to working with stakeholders and local authorities to promote these benefits and grow the country's woodland cover.

The appointment of a Tree Champion is a key commitment of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. The plan, launched in January this year, sets out how we will improve the environment over a generation, including through growing woodland cover.

Since the launch of this plan, Government has committed to providing almost £6 million to kick-start the creation of an ambitious [Northern Forest](#) along the M62 corridor. We want to see 50 million trees planted over the next 25 years from Liverpool to Hull – boosting habitats for woodland birds and bats and protecting iconic species like the red squirrel.

The Government has also made it easier to apply for its woodland creation grant schemes, recently approving two large-scale woodland creation projects. More than 600,000 trees are being planted at [Doddington North Moor](#) in Northumberland, while Lowther Park in the Lake District is planting more than 200,000 trees thanks to government funding.

Sir William Worsley will be appointed in the role for one year, and his responsibilities will include:

- Promoting the Government's woodland creation schemes to landowners and other stakeholders and encouraging the right trees to be planted in the right places.
- Driving forward the Government's manifesto commitment to plant 11 million trees.
- Working with Defra and Forestry Commission on the design of future environmental land management outside the EU.
- Identifying and promoting best practice across local government to prevent the unnecessary felling of street trees – supporting the introduction of a new duty for local councils to consult before felling.
- Working across local government to ensure ancient woodland is more strongly protected.
- Supporting the planting of one million urban trees, and influencing decision-makers to generate ideas and buy-in locally.
- Working with Defra's Chief Plant Health Officer to drive the protection of tree health across England, raising awareness of the impact pests and diseases have on our environment and economy.

Tree Champion – Terms of Reference

- The appointment of a Tree Champion is a commitment in the 25 Year Environment Plan. The stated objective is to promote the benefits of

trees and forests, support manifesto commitments and targets, and drive a step change in tree planting.

- The Tree Champion will promote the government's woodland creation schemes to landowners and other stakeholders, to encourage take-up. The Tree Champion will also support Defra and Forestry Commission with the development of a future grant scheme outside the EU to encourage woodland creation.
- The Tree Champion will bring together Mayors, city leaders and other key players across government to promote the value of trees in urban and rural environments and promote local authorities' development of comprehensive Tree and Woodland Strategies for their areas.
- The Tree Champion will explore how local authorities can improve their reporting on tree felling and re-planting, as well as encourage more effective approaches to tree management that promote and preserve the benefits of existing street trees, while at the same time managing the health and safety risks associated with diseased trees.
- The Tree Champion will do this by challenging the forestry sector and other stakeholders to develop new ideas and ways of working and by listening to their concerns and aspirations for the development of future policy.
- This role will report to Defra Ministers responsible for Forestry Policy and Plant Health & Biosecurity

Objectives

- The advice and recommendations of the Tree Champion will help contribute to the achievement of Defra's objectives. In particular, the Tree Champion will support a number of manifesto commitments:
 - The 11 million trees commitment, by promoting the government's woodland creation schemes to landowners and other stakeholders, to encourage take-up
 - The 1 million urban trees commitment by influencing decision-makers to generate ideas
 - The commitment to strengthen the protection of ancient woodlands through the planning system
 - Supporting the introduction of a new duty for local councils to consult before felling
- The Secretary of State is keen that the Tree Champion supports other objectives, as follows:

- Explore how local authorities can improve their reporting on tree felling and replanting.
- Convene and marshall forestry and other stakeholder views to support Defra and Forestry Commission in their design of a future environmental land management scheme
- Work with Defra's Chief Plant Health Officer to strengthen the protection of trees from pest and disease threats and improve resilience of trees in England, this includes raising awareness of the impact pests and diseases have on our environment and economy.

Outcomes

- The Tree Champion will make recommendations to the Defra Forestry Minister and the Plant Health Minister who will then consider how best to take these forward. These will need to be:
 - Clear and concise cost-effective options to achieve the stated objectives, which take into account the needs of relevant stakeholder forestry bodies and industry interests
 - Aligned with Defra policies including those in the 25 Year Environment Plan, manifesto commitments, the Tree Health Resilience Strategy and the BEIS Clean Growth Strategy
 - Consistent with other Ministerial priorities
- A further anticipated outcome of the Tree Champion's work will be strengthened cooperation and partnership working between the Tree Champion, Defra, Forestry Commission, Natural England and key forestry stakeholders

Working Group

- The Tree Champion will work closely with a Defra officials Working Group, which will meet as required. This will comprise policy leads from Defra Forestry Policy Team, Plant Health Team and delivery leads from the Forestry Commission and Natural England. This group will help the Tree Champion to develop any outputs or other reports for Ministers.
- The Tree Champion will need draw on expertise as required. To be effective the Tree Champion will need a clear mandate from Defra Ministers and to secure time and resource from across the Defra Group to contribute meaningfully and to engage constructively with his role.

Defra Forestry Policy Team

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