

# Reassurance to land managers to plant trees now

Since this news story was published on 5 November 2019, the Government manifesto now commits to plant up to 30,000 hectares of trees per year, across the UK, by 2025.

## **Why land managers should plant trees now**

I understand there is concern among private landowners, land managers and their advisers in England, about committing to woodland creation until the future of grant funding is clearer. I want to reassure you that support for tree planting and woodland creation will continue to be part of this government's agenda. There is no need for concern about how woodland created now will be treated under Environmental Land Management (ELM) in the future and certainly no reason to delay tree planting. To respond to the climate emergency, we need you to plant trees now.

## **Defra's commitment**

Defra is already committed to supporting woodland creation throughout England through Countryside Stewardship (CS) grants, the Woodland Carbon Fund (WCF) and other incentives available now. The CS Woodland Creation Grant can provide up to an average of £6,800 per hectare for individual applications. This covers the capital costs of both planting and tree protection. The WCF can provide similar support for standard sites, but up to £8,500 per hectare for peri-urban sites offering public access. Newly created woodlands are also eligible for substantial maintenance payments of either £200 per hectare each year for 10 years under CS, or a one-off capital payment of £1,000 per hectare in year 5, following successful establishment, under WCF. Woodlands and forestry created through the support of these existing grants will capture carbon, helping to meet our net zero emissions target for the UK, as well as supporting our biodiversity and water objectives. To respond to the climate emergency, we need you to take-up these good offers and to plant trees now.

## **Driving woodland creation**

The Rural Development Programme and its CS Woodland Creation Grant is our key driver for woodland creation, and over the past two years has funded 3 million of the 3.6 million trees planted, supported by the government. Defra is committed to support all landowners who take-up any of our current grant schemes. The Forestry Commission also provides the Woodland Creation Planning Grant to support landowners to prepare woodland creation plans that meet the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard. These plans can then be used to apply for either Countryside Stewardship or the Woodland Carbon Fund. As well as these grants, the government is now launching an additional, new support

mechanism; the 'Woodland Carbon Guarantee' (WCaG), which will offer landowners in England planting new woodlands, long-term payments for the carbon captured by these new woods. The combination of our current grants and the new Woodland Carbon Guarantee means there is no reason at all to delay decisions on woodland creation. To respond to the climate emergency, we need you to plant trees now.

## **Our approach going forward**

We believe in the importance of short and long-term approaches to protecting and enhancing the landscape in England for the next generation. We have a manifesto commitment to plant 11 million trees by 2022 and committed in our 25 Year Environment Plan to increase woodland cover to 12% in England by 2060. Land owners taking up our current grant offers for woodland creation will be capturing carbon emissions and greatly adding to our existing woodland cover. Woodland creation will continue to be supported during the period of transition from the Countryside Stewardship scheme, before the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM) is rolled-out in late 2024, following three years of pilots. We recognise that trees, woodlands and forestry in different situations, designed and planted for different objectives, provide multiple benefits and can help deliver the six public goods that ELM will pay for, as we listed in the 25 Year Environment Plan. These include: climate change adaptation and mitigation; thriving plants and wildlife; and protection from and reduction of environmental hazards. We are considering the future role of ELM in incentivising woodland creation, alongside other sources of funding, including our current grant offers. Regardless of how we fund woodland creation, the on-going benefits that trees, woodlands and forestry offer will need to be considered within or alongside the future ELM scheme, so there's nothing to be gained by waiting to see what ELM will do for woodland creation. To respond to the climate emergency, we need you to plant trees now.

## **Treatment of woodland created now, during the agricultural transition**

We have heard from some stakeholders that land managers are concerned they may be disadvantaged if they plant trees on their land now, as that land or those trees they plant, now, would somehow 'not count' towards any qualifying environmental requirements for the future ELM system. This is simply not the case. We have already been clear that no-one in a Countryside Stewardship agreement will be unfairly disadvantaged when we transition to new arrangements under ELM. This applies to those taking up any of our current woodland creation offers, so there is no reason to put off decisions to create new woodlands and forests. We will make sure there is a smooth transition to ELM, so that land managers already delivering improved environmental outcomes using our woodland creation grant funding, are incentivised to continue to do that throughout the agricultural transition, with minimal disruption. There is no need for concern about how woodland created now will be treated under ELM in the future and certainly no reason to delay tree planting. To respond to the climate emergency, we need you to

plant trees now.

## **Reassurance to landowners**

I reiterate that: our current grants present an attractive offer; trees, woodlands and forestry will be considered within or alongside the future ELM scheme; and no one creating new woodlands using our current grants will be unfairly disadvantaged when we transition to new arrangements under ELM. Until then, take-up of our current grants offers a viable, long-term source of income for delivering environmental benefits. I urge land managers to take up these offers, now. I'm reminded of an old Chinese proverb: "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the second best time is now", which feels particularly relevant today.

Yours sincerely,

Zac Goldsmith