

# Tree planting effort leaves a lot to be desired

**Ben Webster**  
Environment Editor

We are told that great oaks from little acorns grow and that if we are patient, our forests can once again thrive.

Yesterday, however, it appeared that the root and branch reform of tree planting to tackle climate change was not on target.

Overall 33,260 acres of trees were planted in the year to the end of March, down from 33,458 acres the year before.

The Conservative manifesto pledged to increase planting to 74,000 acres a year by 2025. More than 81 per cent of last year's planting took place in Scotland. Ministers then promised in the budget in March to plant 74,000 acres in England over the next five years, an average of 14,800 acres a year.

Tree planting in England increased last year from 3,509 to 5,758 acres but is far below the rate needed to reach the target. Planting fell in Scotland, Wales



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and Northern Ireland last year.

Darren Moorcroft, chief executive of the Woodland Trust, said: "These new statistics show we are a long way from where we need to be. The government's planned England Tree Strategy needs to deliver a bold vision . . . not just more trees in the ground, but planning as part of the landscape, so they deliver for carbon, nature and people."

Woodland covers 13 per cent of the UK compared with an EU average of 38 per cent. The UK's woodland cover was only 5 per cent in 1919, when the

Forestry Commission was created to address the severe shortage of timber following the First World War.

The current overall UK figure masks the fact that only 10 per cent of England is occupied by trees. In Scotland it is 19 per cent, Wales 15 per cent and Northern Ireland 9 per cent.

The Royal Forestry Society said that landowners were keen to plant many more trees but were being held back by red tape and uncertainty over subsidies. A survey of almost 700 of its members found that only 23 per cent had creat-