

Consultation on a new England Tree Strategy

Response by the Forestry Climate Change Working Group

Climate change is having far-reaching impacts on the health of our trees and woods. Forest, woodland and tree owners and managers have always managed risk and uncertainty, but the pace and scale of environmental change experienced over the past 25 years and expected over the next 50 years presents a challenge of an altogether different order of magnitude. Climate change is likely to require fundamental changes to accepted forestry management policy and practice to ensure woods and trees are adapted to projected environmental conditions.

The Forestry Climate Change Working Group (FCCWG) was established in 2014 in recognition of the need to provide and lead a sector level response to the challenge of climate change adaptation. Membership¹ of the FCCWG includes representative organisations covering land and woodland owners, Chartered Foresters and the supply chain, and research organisations, NGO's and government.

In 2015 the FCCWG launched the Climate Change Accord², which was signed by 35 organisations and states *"We believe that it is necessary to act now to provide a secure future for our forests, woods and trees, that significant changes are required to widely accepted and practiced systems of management to make them resilient, and we are committed to help realise the vision set out in this Accord."* The Group also endorses the Forestry Commission's 'Managing England's woodlands in a climate emergency' guide³ published in 2019.

The Action Plan⁴ for Climate Change Adaptation of forests, woods and trees in England was published in September 2018, to provide a single point of focus for collective action on adaptation, to identify priority actions and to provide a basis for monitoring progress in achieving its intended outcomes. The Action Plan outlines thirteen priority actions grouped into the three areas of Policy, Research and Practice. A Progress Report⁵, published in 2019, identified some areas of achievement, but in relation to Practice, commented that *'Despite the progress made in knowledge transfer, including of research findings, there is little evidence of an up-turn in the implementation of adaptation measures. Efforts, to date, do not appear to have been effective in eliciting change, suggesting that much further work, resources and commitment are required to deliver the scale and rate of change required.'* In conjunction with the Institute of Chartered Foresters, the Group has organised a series of seminars for practitioners in Autumn 2020, in part to address this need.

¹ Country Land and Business Association, Confor, Defra, Forestry Commission, Forest Research, Future Trees Trust, Institute of Chartered Foresters, National Trust, Natural England, Pryor & Rickett Silviculture, Royal Forestry Society, Sylva Foundation, Tilhill Forestry, Tree Council, Woodland Heritage, Woodland Trust.

² https://www.rfs.org.uk/media/511815/climate_change_accord_2015.pdf

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-englands-woodlands-in-a-climate-emergency>

⁴ <https://www.rfs.org.uk/media/512806/action-plan-for-climate-change-adaptation.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.rfs.org.uk/media/605364/fccwg-climate-change-adaptation-progress-report.pdf>

It is in this context that the FCCWG believes that the forthcoming England Tree Strategy represents a generational opportunity to direct, focus and support climate change adaptation across the sector, a pre-requisite for England's trees to take centre stage in the UK's legally binding commitment to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. . Adaptation must be considered as a mitigation measure to protect and maintain our forest carbon sink'

Climate change adaptation should be central to the Strategy's aims and objectives and underpin all the measures and actions proposed relating to expanding, protecting and improving our trees and woodlands

The Climate Change Accord contains seven guiding principles, which we propose should be use as test for the forthcoming Tree Strategy. Each of these principles should be addressed in the Strategy, and any proposed actions should meet the requirement of the relevant principle(s).

1. There is no single approach that must be followed; different owners and organisations will apply the principles differently to meet their own objectives, which in itself will promote diversity and increase resilience.
2. All forests, woods and trees should be cared and managed for site-appropriate economic, environmental and social benefits, according to the guidelines of the UK Forestry Standard.
3. It is essential that our resource of forests, woods and trees continues to grow, expand and regenerate on a sustainable basis.
4. Action is urgently required to adapt to threats to our forests, woods and trees.
5. The importance and value of trees in the wider landscape, and the relevance of land management activities outside woodlands, should be considered fully.
6. Forest design and management should address the long-term projections for Britain's future climate and take account of the inherent uncertainty of these projections, especially given the long-term nature of forest management.
7. Actions to improve adaptation should be based upon the best available evidence and the latest projections of climate change, to ensure that forests, woods and trees thrive in the future.

FCCWG members:

CONFOR
CLA
DEFRA
Forestry Commission
Forest Research
Future Trees Trust
Institute of Chartered Foresters
National Trust
Natural England
Pryor and Rickett

Royal Forestry Society
Sylva Foundation
The Tree Council
Tilhill
Woodland Heritage
Woodland Trust

