

The Rt. Hon. Sir Keir Starmer, KCB, KC, MP,
The Prime Minister
By e-mail

12 July 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

A THRIVING FORESTRY SECTOR

Firstly, on behalf of the Royal Forestry Society (RFS), I would like to congratulate you on your recent success at the General Election. We wish you and your Government well in serving the country and its many challenges.

For over 140 years, the RFS has dedicated itself to sharing knowledge on the art and science of woodland management. A thriving forestry sector in the UK could be an important catalyst for developing a new green economy, but it needs help to achieve its great potential.

The Labour Manifesto outlined where forestry can, and we believe should, play a central role in addressing numerous environmental, social and economic issues. Forestry must not be seen as merely a rural concern. From climate management to mental wellbeing, the value of trees and forests are far-reaching, and positively impact UK citizens across the country. Forestry truly is one of our greatest untapped resources.

We were pleased to see the Manifesto identify the climate emergency and nature crises as important issues to address. Extending woodland cover and importantly, getting more existing woods into management, could make a significant impact to these agendas.

The Manifesto describes improving resilience to climate and nature emergencies, including the risks of flooding. Managed woods can provide a natural solution, and reduce the impacts of inland flooding events which are only projected to increase in volume and severity.

Additionally, Forests provide a cost-effective means to capture carbon, especially if the resulting timber can be used for the longer-term, e.g. in buildings. Trees and well managed woods, especially in urban areas, are also vital for lowering temperatures and helping people cope with rising temperatures.

We are pleased to see the commitment to creating 3 new National Forests in England, and would encourage the Government to ensure these are also productive (provide wood for market). The UK is one of the least forested nations in the world, and we import over 80% of our timber, so we support any initiative which will increase woodland cover and reduce our dependence on imported timber.

More can be done if our trees and woods are managed, and we need the Government to help. A large proportion (over 40%) of our nation's woodlands are unmanaged and the vast majority are not in a good or favourable ecological condition. This means many of our woods are underperforming in providing the public goods we need, and also leaves them exposed and less resilient to pests, diseases, and environmental change. We desperately need effective



control of grey squirrels and deer, and woodland management to be better incentivised through land grants, in line with agriculture.

I would like to refer you to the recently published National Wood Strategy <https://www.nationalwoodstrategy.co.uk/> which describes solutions to many of the issues raised above.

Unfortunately, we are seeing fewer people participating in apprenticeships and training and this certainly applies to forestry. We would call upon the Government to reform vocational education, and scrap the failing two tier system of T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications. We recommend review and reform of apprenticeships, to make it easier for small businesses to take on an apprentice whilst providing a living wage in skilled jobs crucial to the economy and environment. The forestry sector is united in their request to make positive changes for those entering the industry.

The Manifesto describes delivering a curriculum which is rich and broad. We believe such a curriculum must include access to nature. The RFS are backers of the Nature Premium campaign <https://www.naturepremium.org/> which aims to guarantee regular time in nature for all children. Access to woodlands and nature is proven to improve mental health and the education attainment of children.

I hope I have illustrated the many and varied ways a thriving forestry sector could serve the nation, and help the Government achieve many of its commitments. If you would like to discuss any of these matters further, please get in touch. I would be delighted to guide you through one of our woodlands to show how we are managing for the climate, resilience, and education.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Williams
Chief Executive, Royal Forestry Society

CC:

The Rt. Hon.	Steve Reed	Environment Secretary
The Rt. Hon.	Bridget Philipson	Education Secretary
The Rt. Hon.	Ed Miliband	Energy Secretary
The Rt. Hon.	Jo Stevens	Secretary of State for Wales
The Rt. Hon.	Hilary Benn	Secretary of State for Northern Ireland