



The Tree Council Policy Digest – June 2019

2018 – environmental matters climb the national agenda

January - the government's [25-year Environment Plan](#) landed, which mentions trees seventy five times. Topline goals on trees include "increasing woodland in England in line with our aspiration of 12% cover by 2060: this would involve planting 180,000 hectares by end of 2042", in addition to increasing commercial timber supplies. One of the promises was to produce a [Tree Health Resilience Strategy](#) which was published by Defra in **May**.

In June, England's first [Tree Champion was appointed by Defra](#) to help achieve their manifesto commitments, including planting 11 million trees and a further 1 million urban trees.

In July – the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published its [revised](#) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the first amendments to be made since 2012, which include tweaks to further protect the appearance of the countryside and habitats featuring ancient and veteran trees.

October - in the 2018 budget, Chancellor Phillip Hammond pledged £60m for tree planting, including £10m match funding for urban and street trees. The Tree Champion Sir William Worsley announced the release of the [Urban Tree Manual](#), which provides advice on selecting and procuring the 'right tree for the right place' in urban areas.

November – Environment Secretary Michael Gove first mentioned that the government would consult on an 'English Tree Strategy' – this is beginning to happen now in summer 2019. The Committee on Climate Change published a [report on land use](#) which stated that tree planting had to be doubled if the UK is going to achieve its carbon reduction goals.

December 2018 - the first draft of the [Environment Bill](#) landed. The Bill has three elements: the establishment of an environmental watchdog called the Office of Environmental Protection; enshrining into domestic law of the current EU environmental policies; giving the 25-year Environment Plan statutory status so that government are more accountable to delivering it.

On the last day of 2018, a consultation was published on a new duty for local councils to consult with residents before tree felling. A key comment on the consultation's proposal has been that local authorities must be resourced properly for any additional duties or monitoring and evaluation responsibilities. Read our response [here](#).

2019 – trees placed at the heart of the climate fight

February - the consultation on tree felling closed in 28th February. Some partners call for whatever approach Defra takes to be piloted before it is rolled out – this is yet to be confirmed as of June 2019.

March - plans to **formally leave the EU** continue to be stalled, with a new date set for October and the responsibility to carry this through now falling to a yet-to-be-appointed successor to Theresa May. The new **Environmental Land Management System**, which will be connected to the new Agriculture Bill and promises to provide landowners and farmers with 'public money for public goods' including tree planting and habitat protection, will not land until 2024, leaving a gap in the legislative framework for environmental stewardship.

April - the largest UK environmental groups have started to place planting trees at the heart of efforts to tackle climate change. Friends of the Earth published a [net zero plan](#) that prominently features trees as carbon sinks. The innovation team are responsible for developing the thinking on how these ambitious tree planting targets can be met – one hint has been made about [planting in the Green Belt](#), where development is restricted.

May - the Committee on Climate Change launches a [report](#) calling for the UK to produce net zero carbon emissions by 2050, which is welcomed by industry. The Tree Council issued a response agreeing that more ambitious tree planting targets are essential to sequester carbon dioxide and calling for the next step to be to develop a realistic plan involving all stakeholders - landowners, farmers, government, charities, businesses and communities. We emphasised that hedgerows and ongoing tree care must feature in this plan. The Woodland Trust responded with a call for faster and more sustained 'new woodland creation and natural regeneration' over the coming decades. They endorsed the call for 'on-farm' planting and the 40% extension of hedgerows. They also called to 'protect and retain' mature trees 'in urban areas, in hedgerows, alongside rivers and transport links and in the farmed countryside generally as well as in existing woodland.'

Who Owns England, the book that summarises the work of the [Who Owns England project](#), was also published on **2 May** and sheds light on the small number of landowners who own the majority of English land. Land ownership is becoming more and more focal to the debate about tree planting targets.

On **16 May**, the government released the first reporting document on progress against the 25 Year Environment Plan. In their [update](#), they confirmed a range of promises related to trees made in the 25YEP as complete, including appointing a Tree Champion, allocating £10 million of funding in the autumn budget for a Challenge Fund for urban trees, and a further £13.1m to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government funding to improve and create parks and green spaces, and publishing the [Tree Health Resilience Strategy](#).

On **20 May**, government announced the official opening of applications for a challenge fund to plant over 130,000 urban trees. The [Urban Tree Challenge Fund](#) is a block grant programme inviting organisations and community groups to bid for funding to plant urban trees.

June – the English Tree Champion is confirmed in his post for a second year. As Theresa May promises that enshrining the recommendations of the latest CCC report into law will be her parting shot as PM, [the Guardian reports](#) worrying statistics showing that we are not hitting current national tree planting targets. However, [HortWeek](#) reports Scotland has 'smashed' tree planting targets, proving it can be done! We will be pushing in the coming months to set and achieve more concrete commitments for tree planting, starting with our Forum for Trees on 11 July. These targets must include tree care and maintenance and protecting existing treescapes.