

# Woodland Trust response to Bright Blue's Call for written evidence on a Conservative manifesto for conservation. March 2019

## Rural

1. Where is there scope for the agricultural sector to assist in mitigating carbon emissions (for example, through carbon sinks)?

Trees in the right place can mitigate carbon emissions, (and also provide other public benefits). For example, in Wales the total new woodland creation target based on CCC estimate of what is needed to deliver no more than 1.5o warming is 120,000 ha by 2050. To achieve 50% of the total target would mean planting 3.75% of farmland or 1.8 ha on an average Welsh farm. By doing this in the form of shelter belts, hedges and small copse this could also have significant positive impacts on productivity and welfare of stock as well as water, soil, air quality and biodiversity.

This should extend to the entire land management sector, not just the agricultural sector. The Woodland Carbon Code is an existing scheme approved by the Forestry Commission ([www.forestry.gov.uk/carboncode](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/carboncode)).

2. Are there any nascent developments in the agricultural sector which could reduce the sector's environmental footprint? If so, should they be recipient to government funding?

Yes, new and revitalised methods that reduce the footprint and provide public benefit should be funded. However, such methods must demonstrate additionality and an improvement. This would require local standards, such as amount of organic carbon in soil, with raising the level above that seen as a positive fundable intervention.

Agroforestry is the intentional integration of trees into land management practices, further information here: *Agroforestry in England*: [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2018/06/agroforestry-in-england/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2018/06/agroforestry-in-england/)

There is an abundance of evidence of benefits of trees on farms (dairy farms; sheep farms; poultry farms, arable farms): [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/search/?Query=farming&sortby=date&count=12](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/search/?Query=farming&sortby=date&count=12)

3. What measures or practices can the agricultural sector engage in to best protect or enhance biodiversity in rural Britain?

Reducing use of agrochemicals (to the benefit of insects & pollinators); Precision farming (making sure what is put on the soil is used in the soil); Protect and manage important habitats, especially ancient woodland; Plant more trees on farms; Control deer and other pests; More organic farms; Land-sharing. Again, this should extend to the entire land management sector, not just the agricultural sector

4. What measures or practices can the agricultural sector engage in to best protect or enhance soil quality in rural Britain?

There are several measures of soil quality – physical, chemical (links to carbon sinks) and biological. Reducing soil compaction will reduce surface water run-off and associated soil loss, and providing trees or hedge belts will increase permeability of the soil – the Pont Bren research shows that planting hedges along contours in upland areas will intercept water and soil ([www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2013/02/the-pontbren-project/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2013/02/the-pontbren-project/)). Planting trees (and stopping grazing) along the banks of watercourses will help prevent bank collapse.

5. Should the UK engage in rewilding? If so, to what extent?

The Trust believes that 'rewilding' is about the restoration of natural processes, working with nature to enhance the natural environment and the species it supports, but also to provide the goods and services we need as a society. We support the view that re-establishing natural processes can be an important and powerful way to manage land alongside conventional or traditional forms of land management for food production and maintaining valued landscapes. Whilst wild areas may be separate from farmed landscapes, there are also opportunities for integrating more wild space within farming systems in ways which support both wildlife and production. Creating a sense of wildness is possible in most places, and this has started in places, demonstrating that production from a low-intensity system can produce high-value products

6. How can pollinator decline be halted and reversed?

Stop using neo-nicotenoids and provide more nesting and foraging areas for pollinators. Buglife and other bee charities have detailed advice.

8. Should organic farming be better supported?

Yes, but only where the practices do not add to pollution of air, soil and water.

9. What are the most important public goods provided by the agricultural sector which should be rewarded through government funding?

The use of the term “public good” is poorly understood by non-economists, which has led to ongoing queries about whether food production should be included. The relative importance of any particular public good will depend on the geographical location and the pressures that have developed as a result of geology, climate, past management or cultural impacts.

We suggest that environmental outcomes are interlinked and should be afforded appropriate priority given the important cross-government public policy challenges they address. It should also, in many cases, be possible to deliver these outcomes simultaneously. For example, the planting of appropriately managed woodland or shelter belts in key locations will provide highly stable soils with low erosion risk, but will also absorb rainfall which helps to reduce flooding and provide valuable habitat for a variety of species, in addition to sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. Further information on flood alleviation is here:

*Stemming the flow – the role of trees and woods in flood protection* -

[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2014/05/stemming-the-flow/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2014/05/stemming-the-flow/) ; *Woodland actions for biodiversity and their role in water management* - [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2008/03/woodland-actions-for-biodiversity-and-their-role-in-water-management/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2008/03/woodland-actions-for-biodiversity-and-their-role-in-water-management/)

10. What are the key policies which the Government should introduce to better protect Britain’s rural environments?

There needs to be a strong, ambitious and overarching Environment Act to set the principles for environmental governance and management for the next 25 years. This should include: An overarching duty on all public bodies to secure the maintenance, recovery and restoration of the environment, so that the environment is healthy, resilient and sustainable for the benefit of people and wildlife; A full set of thematic and time-bound objectives which the secretary of state must achieve to comply with the overarching duty.

The objectives must be at least as strong as those included in existing legal obligations, and should address at least the following: A healthy environment, people engaged and empowered and our impacts managed; A statutory duty to produce and deliver a tree and woodland strategy (updated at five yearly intervals).

We need any new land use policy to be delivering on targets set out in the Environment Act, which effectively brings these strands together in a way that can be understood and acted on by everyone. More information is here: *Sustainable Land Management*:

[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2018/04/sustainable-land-management-april-2018/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2018/04/sustainable-land-management-april-2018/)

The government should commit to ongoing support for transformative landscape scale initiatives such as the Northern Forest led by the Woodland Trust and the community forests: <https://thenorthernforest.org.uk/>

## Urban

1. What are the key policies which the Government should introduce to better protect Britain’s urban environments?

Stronger protection is required for features outside of protected sites. Green infrastructure should have a higher priority in national and local planning policy, and tree canopy cover targets should aim to retain existing large trees as well as planting new ones. Key irreplaceable features (such as ancient woodland and veteran trees) in urban environments need protection from the development of other infrastructure requirements such as new roads and railways.

2. What can improve a city or town’s efficiency and environment?

A well-managed and extensive Green Infrastructure network is vital for urban areas. In particular, there is now a wealth of evidence on the many benefits of woodland, trees and high canopy cover, including

improving: physical and mental health; air quality; water quality; water management (reducing flooding); shading; cooling through evapotranspiration; as well as the more obvious benefit of improving biodiversity.

3. How can new developments for housing and other infrastructure projects be made more ecologically friendly?

Guidance on the retention and planting of trees in new development, along with the background research and evidence for the benefits mentioned above, can be found in the report “Residential Development and Trees” (Woodland Trust, 2019)

4. Should more building be permitted on green belt designated land? If so, how should such development be carried out so as to minimise ecological harm (or maximise ecological benefit)?

Green Belt is a particular planning designation to achieve specific purposes, but it nonetheless allows land management that can provide environmental, especially ecological, benefit. Maximising the uptake of management that achieves these benefits (such as creation of accessible woodland) should be the focus, rather than looking to reduce the quantity of land designated. All new development, wherever it is sited (including urban, peri-urban or rural) must achieve Net Gain for Biodiversity, which means no existing irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland) can be harmed.

5. How important is access to green and blue space in urban areas and what policies could the Government adopt to improve access to such spaces in the UK?

Improvements in health & well-being (mental and physical) is the most important benefit of such access. Policies should: Take a more ambitious, strategic approach to the use of tree cover and green space across a range of agendas; Provide better protection for woods and trees through the planning system; Increase public involvement in the planning and management of green space; Recognise the savings to the public purse that can be achieved by using wooded green space as a preventative health care tool; Provide increased resources to encourage active and healthy lifestyles through visits to woods close to where people live; Adopt access standards such as Natural England’s ANGSt and the FC-approved Woodland Access Standard, and mandate Local Plans to only allow development that improves those standards; The NHS should make more use of green prescription.

See *Healthy Woods, Healthy Lives* (Woodland Trust 2014) for more information:  
[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2013/10/healthy-woods-healthy-lives/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2013/10/healthy-woods-healthy-lives/)

7. How much of a problem is littering and fly-tipping in the UK and what can the Government do to better address it?

The government needs to provide adequate ring-fenced resources for active enforcement and investigation of littering and fly-tipping, and tougher punishment that would act as a deterrent. Disposing of waste should be easily available at more locally available Council civic amenity sites, and garden waste bins provided at affordable prices.

The Woodland Trust’s bill for clearing up the mess across its woods in 2018 was £200,000, an annual cost which has risen by £70,000 over the past five years. Since 2014, the total cost of clearance – including routine litter picking and fly-tipping – has risen to £1.1 million. In 2018, there were 1290 individual tipping and littering incidents recorded in the UK – 998 of these in English woods. More statistics, including a regional breakdown, are available here: [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/press-centre/2019/01/fly-tipping/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/press-centre/2019/01/fly-tipping/)

'Green tipping' (garden waste such as grass clippings, hedge trimmings, weeds and leaves) is an issue - although seemingly harmless, the additional nutrients allow vigorous weeds to smother specialised woodland flora, and invasive non-native species (such as Japanese knotweed) can be introduced.

## **International**

6. What are the main threats to biosecurity for the UK, and how could the Government better protect the UK from them?

To tackle the UK’s biosecurity threats, the Woodland Trust is calling for: Effective point of entry biosecurity and greater control over movement of biological materials to prevent the introduction of more tree pests and diseases; All native trees sourced and grown in the UK, using locally sourced seed; Responses and adaptation that builds resilience across landscapes, delivering for native wildlife ecosystems and people.