



Trees-improving the natural landscape

Resolution Shortlist Briefing Notes



Trees-improving the natural landscape

To improve air quality, mitigate climate change, reduce flooding and erosion, and visually enhance the environments where we live, work and visit, the NFWI calls on WI members to take action and plant trees, protect trees and woodland, enjoy the opportunities for nature in their local environment – and inspire others to do the same. The NFWI also calls on the Government at both national and local levels to make a strenuous effort (and legislate where necessary) to increase the number of trees planted.

Proposer's position

The proposer is concerned that the number of trees planted is declining due to local authority budget cuts and the disappearance of the green belt. She would like the WI to remind people that trees are vital to the planet and encourage members as well as local and national government to take action.

The scale of the problem

In the UK, forests cover just 13% of the total land area, compared with the European average of 38%. Coverage is slightly higher in Wales (15%) than in England (10%), but this is still considered low.

The Woodland Trust has warned that “poor planting rates, woodland losses, and weak protection of ancient woods mean that in England, we are highly likely to be in a state of net deforestation, with some areas of woodland canopy felled or destroyed and not replanted”. Data obtained by The Sunday Times shows that in the last three years, more than 110,000 trees have been cut down by councils across the UK.

In its 25 year plan to improve the environment, the Government stressed the importance of planting more trees – “planting more trees provides not just new habitats for wildlife – it also helps reduce carbon dioxide levels and can reduce flood risk”.

The current situation in the UK

Since 2001, the Welsh Government has had a strategy in place to increase the area of woodland in the country. In June 2018, it was updated (following an earlier revision in 2009) to include commitments such as:

- Achieving at least the minimum planting rate of 2,000ha each year from 2020 to 2030, as recommended by the UK Climate Change Committee.
- Increasing tree cover in the wider environment, on farms and the rural landscape and in and around towns and cities.

In 2008, the Welsh Government also launched an initiative called ‘Plant!’ which committed to planting a native Welsh tree in new woodlands for every child born or adopted in Wales. More than 300,000 trees have been planted so far. In 2014, the scheme was expanded so

that an additional tree is now planted in Uganda each time one is planted in Wales. The aim is to provide local communities with a sustainable supply of food and shelter.



However, there are fears that woodland creation is not progressing fast enough. The Woodland Trust has highlighted that currently 400 hectares per year are planted in Wales, which is much lower than the target of 2,000 hectares. Following its 2017 inquiry into woodland policy in Wales, the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee reached a similar conclusion. It noted that “since 2010, Wales has managed to plant just one-tenth of its target of 35,000 ha, with 90% of this being broadleaved woodland and planting rates since 2014 have been especially poor”.

In June 2018, the UK Government appointed Sir William Worsley as the first ‘tree champion’ to spearhead its plan to grow 11 million new trees in England’s forests and woodland (as well as one million in urban areas). He has also been tasked with working alongside mayors and city leaders to prevent the unnecessary felling of ‘street trees’. This is part of the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan, launched in January 2018.

Since the launch of this plan, the Government has committed to providing almost £6 million to kick-start the creation of the ‘Northern Forest’ alongside the M62, as well as approving two large-scale woodland projects. In addition, in October 2018 the Chancellor announced an additional £60 million to plant more than 10 million trees in England over the next 30 years, £10 million of which will be allocated to planting local community street and urban trees.

However, as in Wales, there are concerns that progress is too slow. While Government investment has been welcomed, charities have warned that it’s not enough. Responding to the Chancellor’s announcement of £60 million, Friends of the Earth said “we need to double the UK’s forest cover if we’re going to avoid climate breakdown, and this won’t be nearly enough money.” The Woodland Trust has expressed similar doubts arguing that “the £10m promised for new urban trees won’t go far. When compared to the losses we have recently seen, it is doubtful that there will even be a net uplift in tree numbers with that investment”.

There are various reasons why planting new trees has stagnated, such as development on the greenbelt and local authority budget cuts which mean that councils have to balance the value of trees with the cost of maintaining them and the potential insurance risks if they are found to contribute to accidents.

In addition to local and national government action, there are steps that can be taken by individuals. The Woodland Trust, for example, is encouraging the public to plant trees in their communities and come together to prepare neighbourhood plans that consider woods and trees.

How could the WI work on this issue if it was passed?

A full campaign would be developed by the NFWI if the resolution is passed, taking into account developments since then. To help inform your discussions, here are some ways the WI could consider working on this issue.

At local and regional levels, members could plant trees in their local communities (following the relevant guidelines and policies) and organise events to raise awareness of the threats to UK trees and the benefits of planting more. Members could also support existing efforts to monitor and report threats to woodlands and develop neighbourhood plans that consider woodlands and trees.

Nationally, the NFWI could work with other organisations such as Friends of the Earth and The Woodland Trust to call on Government to commit more funding to planting trees.

Arguments for the resolution

- This resolution ties in with the work of several charities at both a national and local level so it offers excellent partnership potential.
- It presents lots of opportunities for WI members to take action locally.
- The resolution fits with the WI's rural roots and history of environmental campaigns.

Arguments against the resolution

- The UK and Welsh Governments have made a number of recent commitments on this issue. Is this a good time to be asking for further action?

Further information

The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jun/27/are-englands-trees-disappearing>

UK Government: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tree-champion-to-expand-englands-woodland>

Welsh Government: https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-06/woodlands-for-wales-strategy_o.pdf

Video content

This video by the Forestry Commission highlights the importance of planting sustainable forests: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRv1U59o0No>

Public Affairs Department Contacts

If you have any questions about the resolutions or the resolutions process then please get in touch with the NFWI Public Affairs department.

Post: National Federation of Women's Institutes, 104 New Kings Road, London, SW6 4LY

Telephone: 020 7371 9300

Email: publicaffairs@nfwl.org.uk

Website: thewi.org.uk