



STAKEHOLDER BRIEFING



Tree Production in Great Britain

January 2026

Introduction to UK environmental horticulture and landscaping

The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) represents around 1400 UK businesses, including growers, retailers, suppliers, and landscapers who collectively deliver the gardens, green spaces, and green infrastructure that delivers for the economy, the environment, and our health and wellbeing.

Each year, the environmental horticulture sector contributes £38bn to GDP and supports 722,000 jobs. The tree nursery, planting and management sector generates £2.6 billion annually and supports over 22,000 jobs¹. Tree production takes many different forms and has a variety of end markets in the UK. From trees for forests to trees for fruit, for woodlands, for streets, for timber and for our gardens. The motivation for planting trees is many and varied.

Growing and planting trees is crucial for the UK

Trees play a diverse and vital role in our lives. They make our planet healthier, provide shade that cools our environment, create habitats, boost biodiversity, and enrich our lives. In fact, our urban trees and grasslands provided an estimated £893 million in air pollution removal services in 2022 – equivalent to £1.02 billion today.²

Trees can provide shade significant enough to cool concrete surfaces by 12°C, while considerably slowing water runoff, crucial in reducing urban heat island effects and flood risk. (HTA, *Value of Gardens* report, 2025)

In 2024-25, more than 15,000 hectares of new woodland was planted in Great Britain. The UK's Net Zero Strategy requires tree planting to ramp up to 40,000 hectares by 2030, and 50,000 hectares by 2035 with the Climate Change Committee's seventh Carbon Budget setting even more ambitious targets. If we are going to meet those targets, then domestic tree production needs support to be ready. That means unlocking planning barriers, creating a straightforward and consistent grants framework across GB, and working across England, Wales and Scotland, as well as directly with industry to understand and overcome barriers, that will genuinely help to boost our domestic tree production.

¹ Oxford Economics, 2024, *The Economic Impact of Environmental Horticulture and Landscaping in the UK*, <https://www.oxforeconomics.com/resource/the-economic-impact-of-environmental-horticulture-and-landscaping-in-the-uk/>

² Horticultural Trades Association, 2025, *The Value of Gardens*, <https://hta.org.uk/value-of-gardens>



While any tree planting is a step in the right direction, it is important to note that the UK's planting figures only refer to forestry and woodland creation. *They do not account for any hedge planting, street trees, private projects, or any trees planted in private gardens. They also fail to account for tree survival rates – something that we would like to see noted in official tree planting targets.*

Challenges for tree growers across the UK

The UK has the lowest percentage of tree cover and forest hectarage in Europe and as a result, is the second largest importer of timber in the world. In fact, excluding countries located in desert areas, the UK sits amongst the bottom five countries for forest cover as a percentage of total land area. While the Government has set and promoted ambitious woodland creation targets for the UK's devolved nations, the current regulatory framework is hindering progress and deterring investment. For example, in 2024/25, new planting across the UK only reached half the level of the Government's commitment.



Operating costs have also risen substantially in recent months and years, from severe weather to additional paperwork and border issues, increased employment costs, and rising energy costs. Tree nurseries also operate on multi-year lead times. For example, the living stock grown for forestry grant supply cannot realistically be carried across seasons, so alignment between production and tree planting is critical to avoid waste and shortages. Regardless of the trees end market, we need to diversify the range of species grown for resilience and to adapt to rapid changes in growing conditions, but nurseries need confidence in the market to make the necessary investments and propagate the required starter material (e.g. sowing seed, producing rootstock, taking cuttings, and grafting or budding).

Market confidence

Market confidence is essential for business. Growing trees is a long-term investment, with a minimum turnaround time of usually three to five years for small 'whips', rising to decades for larger stock. Planting targets, often underpinned by government grants, drives a substantial proportion of tree planting within Britain. While these national targets should provide confidence and certainty on the quantity of trees that are required, they are often not realised, because of sudden budget reductions and uncertainties in grant processes, approvals, and timeframes. This results in significant stock waste. This is financially damaging for tree nurseries that make investments to grow more, to meet those targets, only to have the grants that help enable that growth removed or reduced without notice.

Examples include the Scottish Government cutting its Forestry Grant Scheme budget in 2024 by 41% (£32 million). Likewise, the sudden closure of the ELM capital grants in England in late 2024 created uncertainty for those growing to supply farming and environmental schemes. Similarly, the Tree Production Capital Grant, Tree Production Innovation Fund and England's Seed Sourcing Grant face



an uncertain future from March 2026. The Horticulture Development Scheme which provided capital support in Wales is also closed. The stop start nature of grant provision has proven extremely disruptive, created uncertainty, and impacted overall market confidence. Similarly, if provenance specification was less demanding and more realistic, more growers could meet and access grants, which would boost overall growing in GB.

Without market confidence, any gaps in our tree planting targets are plugged with imported material, which could otherwise have been produced in the UK. Forestry capacity is high, but confidence is low. UK growers want to grow more but will not make the investments necessary without an end market. Government should work more closely with the industry to ensure the communication and access to grants is appropriate. If we do not get this right, we will fail to fully realise the climate and biodiversity benefits provided by our trees and fail to maximise the potential for more domestically produced trees.

Similarly, the Government has stated its desire to see more tree planting in our towns and cities to increase overall canopy cover, yet over the past two years, access to tree planting grants and funding for tree planting have been removed from Local Authority budgets. It takes a nursery at least five years to produce a tree to the size most Local Authorities need (8-10cm) but this cycle of inconsistency in funding results in substantial wastage of high-quality trees and that reduces the appetite to invest in future tree production. That is why government planting grants and access to funding must be clear and consistent, with cross-party support to offer long-term certainty.

The HTA has called for a minimum garden density of 29.5% in all new housing developments. Such metrics can provide a useful tool and target. The 3:30:300 rule, developed by a Dutch urban forestry expert, Cecil Konijnendijk, could also be adopted as a benchmark for urban greening. This metric has been tested and used in several European cities including Flanders, Malmö, Paris, Aix-en-Provence, Florence, Asti, Turin, Amsterdam and Utrecht. According to this simple rule, every individual should be able to see 3 mature trees from a window in their house. Their local community should have a minimum of 30% canopy cover, and everyone should be no more than 300 metres from an accessible, public green space. This is a simple but powerful metric that could be adopted across all UK Local Authorities, which would support climate adaption – both cooling urban areas and offering flood mitigation – while also boosting the health and wellbeing of communities living in towns and cities.

Water resilience

While trees have deep root systems and can generally cope with periods of drought more effectively than other plants, prolonged drought, like that experienced in Spring and Summer 2025, can have a detrimental impact on tree health. As a result of climate change, long periods of drought and flooding is likely to become more commonplace.

As an industry that relies on water to flourish, we fully support greater water resilience for all. A comprehensive, long-term water resilience strategy is long overdue. Incentives like DEFRA's Water Management Grants were a welcome initiative but had limited success because the investment



minimum was too high to make it viable for SMEs. Set against a backdrop of increasing business costs, growers need financial support to help take pressure off the UK's water system and provide an economic and environmental return on investment.

Rootstock production



When a tree cultivar or variety cannot reliably reproduce true to form from seed, it must be propagated clonally. One of the options is grafting a cutting (scion) onto a rootstock. This is common practice for fruiting trees and many ornamental tree species. The scion wood is often sourced in Britain. For example, for fruit trees, Britain hosts orchards with large numbers of cultivars, including heirloom varieties, and nurseries may also hold their own 'mother tree' collection.

However, British-grown rootstock has been in decline over the past decade because of readily available imports. The loss of this industry has also reduced rootstock breeding within Britain. Increasing interest in agroforestry roles, including planting of productive trees, is expected to drive demand for fruit and nut trees. To ensure that the Government's

aims to increase tree cover on farmland and in urban areas to deliver maximum economic and biosecurity benefits, rootstock supply should be considered. This includes recognising and reviving British rootstock production and breeding.

Labour and skills

For those entering the forestry sector, basic horticultural and machinery skills are needed. For nurseries growing fruit, nut and ornamental trees, propagation skills are critical. At present, there are simply not enough courses available for horticultural production, including tree production, potentially due to a lack of visibility of the sector.

To help address this, the House of Lords Horticultural Committee³ and Environmental Horticulture Group (EHG)⁴ recommended embedding horticulture across the national curriculum and careers advice, and doing more to support horticultural education, qualifications and apprenticeships. The EHG's mission green growth paper recommends recognising environmental horticulture, landscaping and arboriculture jobs in the government's green jobs and skills definitions to help with this.⁵ These initiatives should be undertaken to support the horticultural industry, incorporate tree

³ House of Lords Horticultural Committee, 2024, *Sowing the seeds: A blooming English horticultural sector*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41921/documents/208546/default/>

⁴ Environmental Horticulture Group, 2024, *The Economic Impact of Environmental Horticulture and Landscaping in the UK*, <https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/the-economic-impact-of-environmental-horticulture-and-landscaping-in-the-uk/>

⁵ Environmental Horticulture Group, 2024, *Mission Green Growth*, <https://hta.org.uk/missiongreengrowth>



production and ensure that skills are developed to create an innovative, growing sector for the future.

Public sector production facilities have the potential to support the private sector further. For example, they could offer more courses for tree nursery production staff and provide multiple apprenticeship opportunities. These opportunities would help to train current and future nursery staff and support the UK to grow a more diverse range of trees – particularly important as we face climate change and biodiversity loss.

Call to Action

To overcome the challenges set out in this paper and maximise GB tree production, there's a role for policymakers, working alongside industry, to play and some tangible actions that can be taken now, to help us realise our potential.

For Government:

1. **Establish a cross-Government mechanism to bring market confidence and certainty to tree producers.** This should include consistency in the planting grants approval process across all nations.
2. **Increase alignment between tree supply, demand, and planting grants, including for non-forestry tree nurseries.** Recognise the supply chain impact of setting policy in other areas e.g., planning, housing, and land use strategies.
3. **Conduct a feasibility study on what percentage of imported material could be grown in Great Britain.** This should include detailed analysis of import data and costs (particularly important for ornamental sales).
4. **Develop an action plan for productive and ornamental trees.** Use the feasibility study above to inform a productive and ornamental / amenity trees action plan, detailing how the three governments will support this industry.
5. **Increase tree production skills using publicly owned facilities.** Work with tree nurseries within Forestry England and Forestry and Land Scotland to offer tree production apprenticeships and courses for tree nursery staff.
6. **Formally adopt and mandate the 3:30:300 metric to achieve effective urban greening across the UK's towns and cities.**
7. **Establish a tree production research group made up of industry, academia, and government.** Use the outputs of the group to feed into capital, innovation, and automation grants. Ensure provision of tree production capital grants, and flexibility in quote requirements for bespoke and specialised machinery where only one supplier is available.



8. **Work with industry to deliver a long-term UK water resilience strategy.**
9. **Incentivise and lift barriers to onsite water storage for tree production.** Remove unnecessary planning red tape that blocks businesses from investing in reservoirs and rainwater harvesting systems.

For Members of Parliament:

1. Visit a local tree nursery or garden retailer selling British grown trees – the HTA can help to facilitate this.
2. Request a backbench business debate on the importance of trees, planting, and green spaces to the UK, recognising the economic, environmental, and health and wellbeing benefits they bring.
3. Write to DEFRA to highlight the Strong Roots report findings and asking them to act on our nine key asks.
4. Table parliamentary questions, to encourage government to act on our asks.

Suggested parliamentary questions:

- To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her department will establish a cross-Government mechanism to bring market confidence and certainty to tree producers, particularly to ensure consistency in the grants approval process across England and Scotland.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her department will work with the tree production industry to conduct a feasibility study on what percentage of imported material could be grown in Great Britain, as set out in the Strong Roots Report.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her department will work with the tree production industry and representatives like the HTA, to develop an action plan for productive and ornamental trees, as recommended in the Strong Roots report.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her department will work with tree nurseries and seed processing units to encourage them to offer relevant apprenticeship opportunities to ensure the tree production sector has the right people with the right skills for the future.

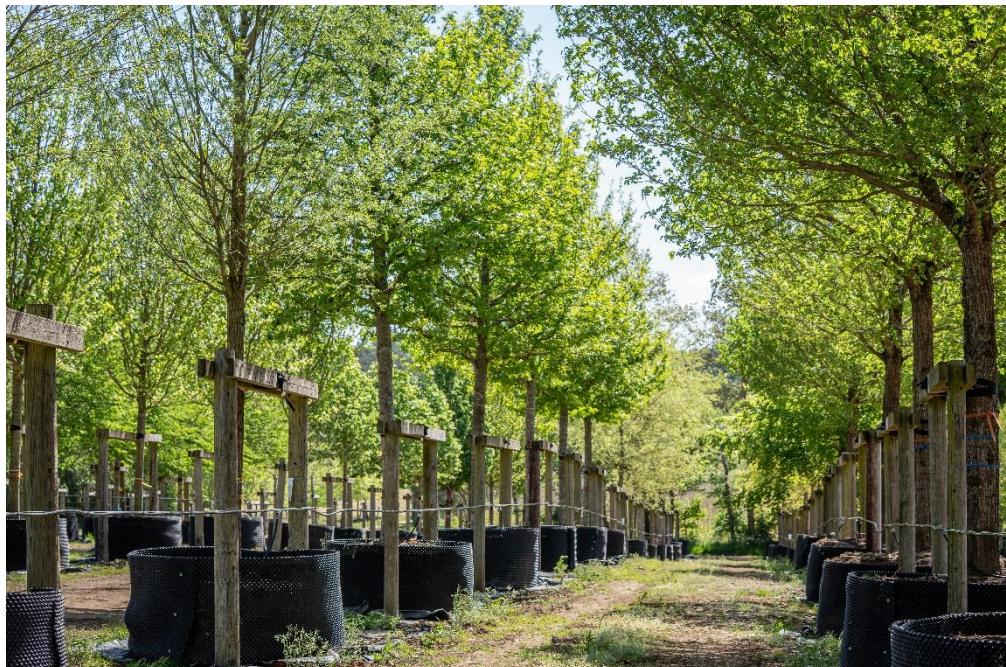


- To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her department will support the 3:30:300 principle for urban greening and mandate the metric across all Local Authorities?

Strong Roots report

In October, the HTA, working in partnership with the RHS, National Trust, and Woodland Trust launched a report setting out how Britain can unlock the full potential of its tree nursery sector. The [report](#) includes a survey, drawing on first-hand experiences from members across the tree production nursery spectrum and highlights the urgent need for certainty and confidence, particularly in the coming months.

Swift and consistent action on the recommendations included in the report will be vital to supporting the businesses that grow the trees our landscapes, communities, environment, and economy need for the future.



For more information & contact details

- [Access the Strong Roots report here](#)
- [Read the Strong Roots press release here](#)
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