FOREST SERVICE
An tSeirbhís Foraoisí

Northern Ireland
Tree Planting Action Plan
2026 - 2032

A Plan for Woodland Creation

An Agency within the Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Gníomhaireacht de chuid na Roinne
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

An Agency wi'in the Depairtment o
Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

Contents

Ministerial Foreword 3

1. Introduction 5

2. Purpose of the Tree Planting Action Plan 2026-2032 8

3. Context for the Tree Planting Action Plan 2026 – 2032 12

4. Tree Planting Action Plan 2026 – 2032 16

5. Governance and Implementation 27

6. Annex A - Strategic Context 29

7. Annex B - Tree Planting Action Plan Co-Design Process 33

8. Annex C - Glossary Of Terms 35

Alternative Formats

On request, we can arrange to provide other formats of this document, such as:

- Paper Copy
- Large Print
- Braille
- Other Languages

To request an alternative format, please contact us by one of the following methods:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/forest-service

Get updates on X: @daera_ni

Forest Service Headquarters

Inishkeen House
Killyhevlin
Enniskillen
BT74 4EJ

Email: customer.forestservice@daera-ni.gov.uk

Telephone: 028 6634 316

Ministerial Foreword

I am delighted to publish the first ever Northern Ireland Tree Planting Action Plan, A Plan for Woodland Creation. The action plan is aligned with the Executive's Programme for Government 2024–2027 and reflects my departments commitment in tackling the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

The development of this action plan comes at a critical time for the landscape and environment that all living here, value and rely on, either directly or indirectly. There is an understanding, informed by science and evidence, that woodlands of all types and scale can mitigate the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. Woodlands are not only a significant part of the solution but are essential to our shared and prosperous future with a sector that already provides skilled employment in rural areas, and which has an ambition to develop further in the horticulture, construction and renewable energy sectors.

This action plan recognises how woodlands provide nature-based solutions to climate change and wider environmental and societal benefits. Importantly it outlines the steps that will support achieving 12% forest cover by 2050.

I am also mindful that the decision by landowners and particularly farm businesses to commit land to forestry is one of major significance, not just for themselves but for generations to come. Delivering the actions set out in this plan will enable farm business owners and landowners to make informed choices to commit land to woodland through a well-supported

and resourced sector. The journey we are taking will help to build the confidence that farm woodlands will be regarded as an asset and a land use option that can be integrated within the productive agricultural landscape of Northern Ireland underpinning economically viable farm enterprises.

I also acknowledge that implementation of the Action Plan will be a dynamic process that needs to continually evolve to keep pace with growing the forestry sector within a changing land use environment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the stakeholders for their valuable engagement in this co-design process to develop this truly collaborative Tree Planting Action Plan. I am greatly encouraged by the participation of stakeholders from across the sector and I feel strongly that the shared vision is to realise the wide-ranging economic, environmental and social benefits that this sector working in collaboration can deliver.

Andrew Muir MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

1. Introduction

1.1 This is the Tree Planting Action Plan 2026-2032 (TAP), A Plan For Woodland Creation in Northern Ireland. It has been developed by Forest Service (FS) through a co-design process in conjunction with its cross-sectoral partners. Delivery of the actions will create the conditions for Northern Ireland to meet its targets for tree planting to increase woodland cover to 12% by 2050. This is aligned with current and proposed Climate Action Plans (CAPs) which are legislative requirements. There is an imperative that the Department and the sector establish a pathway to deliver the scale and pace of change required to meet woodland creation targets and realise the economic, environmental and social benefits of woodlands. In the context of this action plan woodland and forest are used as interchangeable terms.

1.2 The focus of this action plan is specifically to support an increase in woodland cover in Northern Ireland. Efforts to support the creation of new woodlands is a distinct undertaking to that of hedgerow planting and the management of individual or smaller scale amenity tree planting. Landowners making the choice to create woodlands are making a long-term commitment entailing land use change. While woodlands are the focus of this plan this in no way diminishes the important role of hedgerows, individual and amenity tree plantings. Trees outside of woodlands are a significant feature of our landscape and contribute to habitat connectivity, climate adaptation and mitigation through carbon sequestration and storage in the trees and soils.

1.3 In the early 20th Century forests across Northern Ireland were established in response to government recognition of the need to restore forest cover, which had reduced to 1% in the 19th Century. For purposes of national importance, it was deemed essential to develop a domestic supply of timber. It was in this context that many of the forests we are familiar with today were created. These forests were planted on low quality land, typically at higher elevations on steep slopes with highly productive conifer species. The establishment of these forests provided much needed rural employment [1]. In the context of both climate change and biodiversity, there is now a presumption against establishing woodlands on certain habitats such as deep peat or active raised bogs. This change in approach is reflected in research and revisions to the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS)[2]. On this basis, foresters within FS and the private sector are working to increase diversity and develop resilience within existing forests and apply silvicultural best practice to new woodlands that they will continue to establish as part of this joint endeavour.

1.5 Biodiversity loss and climate change must now be addressed. The latter results in increased temperatures, storm events, flooding and droughts, which has significant effects on ecosystems, infrastructure, economies and human populations. Without immediate action, the impacts from biodiversity loss and climate change will accelerate. One such action is the use of woodlands as a nature-based solution to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems. Increasing forest cover is a fundamental nature-based solution in mitigating against climate change, through absorption of carbon dioxide and storage of carbon in the soil.

1.6 Woodland expansion has significant economic potential to supply established UK and EU wood processing markets. The UK is the second-largest net importer of forest products, behind China. Wood imports to the UK in 2024 were valued at a total of £9.2 billion[3]. UK import data reflects an established domestic market with an increasing demand for wood products. An estimated 1000 rural jobs are provided by the forestry and wood processing sector in Northern Ireland which has the potential for growth based in forest expansion and growing confidence of the sector.

1.7 While the Department recognises it has a lead role to play in woodland creation and delivering on this action plan, cross sectoral, collaborative delivery is key, drawing on the combined professional, technical and operational expertise of those working here, with a shared ambition to grow the sector in Northern Ireland for the benefit of all.

1.8 DAERA has a general duty to promote afforestation and sustainable forestry under the Forestry Act 2010 [4]. As an Executive Agency of Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

1 NI FS A History by C.S. Kilpatrick | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

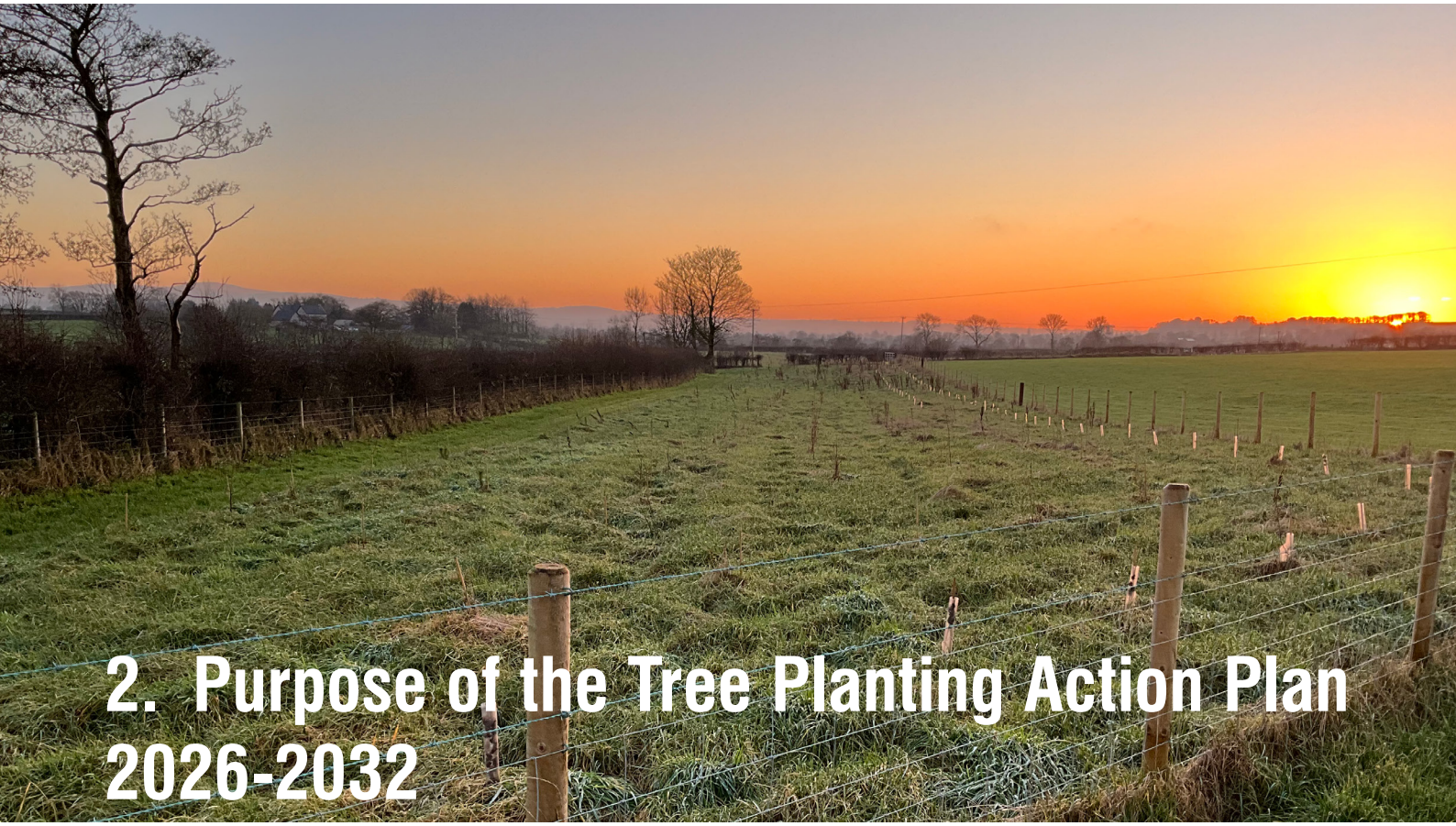
2 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651670336a423b0014f4c5c0/Revised_UK_Forestry_Standard_-_effective_October_2024.pdf

3 2025 - 3: Trade - Forest Research

4 Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 2010

(DAERA), FS leads on the implementation of this general duty and is responsible for setting policy direction and priorities for woodland creation and management.

1.9 In conjunction with forestry, FS also delivers plant health programmes. Delivery of both functions is aligned with the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2024-27 alongside the DAERA strategic direction as set out in the Corporate Plan for 2025-27. The Corporate Plan's theme is delivering change towards net zero nature positive future, supporting sustainable agriculture, and thriving rural communities.



2. Purpose of the Tree Planting Action Plan 2026-2032

2.1 The purpose of the Tree Planting Action Plan (TAP) 2026-2032 is to create the conditions to achieve 12% woodland cover by 2050. The Action Plan recognises the importance of existing partnerships and the value of all tree planting activities including hedges, individual tree planting, urban forestry and agro forestry. However, its primary focus is on achieving an increased level of woodland creation. In summary the plan will support:

- Creation of all woodland types
- Expanding existing woodlands
- Compliance with the UK Forestry Standard

The co-design process underpinning the TAP has been achieved by engagement with cross-sectoral stakeholders to identify potential opportunities to address the barriers identified during stakeholder consultation.

2.2 The action plan is set within four strategic priorities;

I. Governance and Implementation
II. Communication and Knowledge Transfer
III. Education and Capacity Building
IV. Research and Evidence

Within each of these strategic priorities ten strategic actions have been identified, which will be realised through delivery of 31 implementing actions.

2.3 DAERA and FS recognise that woodland creation rates required to reach the 12% target by 2050 can only be achieved through stakeholder co-operation and a commitment to implementing actions through cross-sectoral delivery (co-production). This reflects the co-design approach used to develop the action plan. Extensive stakeholder consultation has ensured collaboration was central to the TAP.

2.4 **Sustainability.**

Sustainable forests are defined as land that is predominantly covered in trees, with a canopy cover of at least 20%, Forestry Act 2010 promotes sustainable forestry for areas of 0.2 hectares or greater. It involves ensuring the production of all forest and woodland benefits are maintained over the long term for future generations. This is achieved when the environmental, economic and social functions of forests are managed in appropriate balance.

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is the technical standard for sustainable forest management in the UK. It sets out the approach adopted by the Devolved Governments of the UK and defines the requirements and provides guidance for foresters on the practice of sustainable forest management. All woodlands supported through FS grants must be planned and established according to the UKFS; this approach ensures new woodlands created will be resilient to the complex and interlinked risks arising from climate change. In recognition of this reality the need to promote biosecurity and maintain the high plant health status of Northern Ireland's forests and the all-island single epidemiological unit of Ireland is reflected in the action plan.

2.5 **Benefits of Forests: Ecosystem Services.**

Ecosystem services are the benefits derived by humans from an ecosystem. Forestry as a land use is unique in having the capacity to deliver an unparalleled range of ecosystem services at global, national and local level. Ecosystem Services are typically grouped into the following four categories; Regulating and Maintenance, Provisioning, Cultural and Supporting and are summarised below[5].

2.5.1 **Regulating and Maintenance Services.**

As they grow, trees capture and store carbon, reducing CO_2 in the atmosphere and turn it into organic matter in the form of leaves, branches, roots and stems helping regulate the climate. On average two to three times more carbon is held in the organic matter and forest soils than is present in the trees above ground. Not only do trees and woodlands mitigate the impact of changing weather patterns of high rainfall over shorter timeframes but also mitigate against

5 Woodland natural capital accounts, UK - Office for National Statistics

extreme temperatures. Woodlands provide shelter for people and livestock and shading of riparian areas, streams for fish and the wider aquatic ecosystem. Forests perform a supporting regulatory function within the water cycle with woodland soils absorbing water and reducing the amount of runoff during rainfall. Trees and woodland vegetation slow down runoff and woodlands in the right place can reduce flood risk by delaying and reducing peak flows.

2.5.2 **Provisioning Services.**

Forests are a source of renewable raw materials with numerous end uses including construction, energy, growing media and pharmaceutical ingredients. Wood from our forests used for construction, furniture and flooring provide long term carbon storage contributing to climate change mitigation post-harvest. Forests and associated management and processing sectors contribute to a skilled, innovative, and high-tech sustainable economy supporting rural communities and benefiting all of society.

2.5.3 **Cultural Services.**

Woodlands and forests provide important recreational spaces for people and contribute to health and wellbeing. The benefits of spending time in woodlands has been extensively researched. In Northern Ireland, collaborative delivery through partnerships established between FS and service delivery partners has been the catalyst for rural income diversification. This is evidenced by the expansion of the recreation and tourism offer within and surrounding forests, including bike hire, saunas, tourist accommodation, cafes, forest bathing, cultural and education activities. This approach highlights the benefits of partnership working and the opportunities that can be stimulated by combining management of woodlands with provision of cultural services.

2.5.4 **Supporting Services.**

Woodlands are home to thousands of species. As our climate changes these species may need to move to places that are better suited to their survival. Connectivity of woodland habitats can support and protect such species. In a further supporting function, research in the UK provides evidence that appropriately designed farm woodlands can capture ammonia emissions from animal housing or in proximity to grazing livestock disperse emissions and reduce atmospheric nitrogen deposition[6].

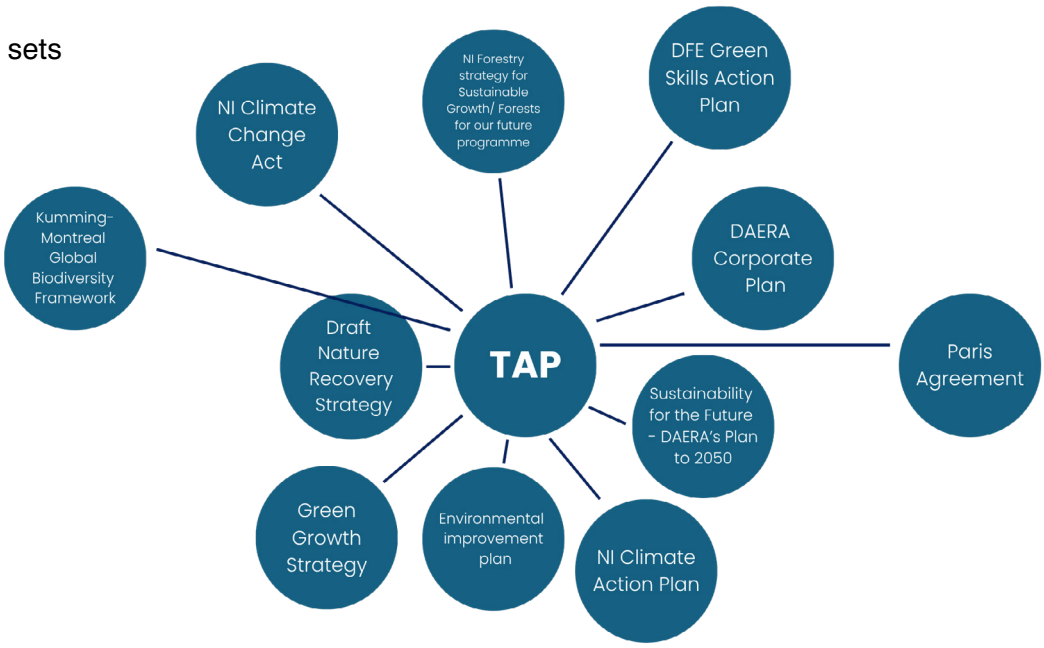
6 Tree Shelter Belts for Ammonia Mitigation | Tree Shelter Belts

3. Context for the Tree Planting Action Plan 2026 – 2032

The TAP has been developed and will be implemented in a context set by the current strategies and polices and by Northern Ireland's current performance against the targets established for tree planting.

3.1. Policy Context [7]

3.1.1 This infographic sets out the policy context within which the TAP has been developed and will be implemented:



7 Further detail on the policy context for the Tree Planting Action Plan is outlined in Annex A.

3.1.2 The Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 provides a legal framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sets a target of net zero emissions by 2050 and interim targets for 2030 and 2040. The Act introduces a requirement for the development of CAPs[8], which will set out the policies and proposals that departments will implement to meet the corresponding carbon budget as well as set out how the emissions reduction targets will be achieved. The Act requires that policies and proposals in CAPs support, as far as practical, nature-based projects and actions set out in this action plan seek to align with this goal.

3.1.3 In developing the Tree Planting Action Plan, DAERA recognises the duty to deliver on relevant 2030 targets[9] and the 2050 global goals within the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. While there are several relevant targets, Target 8, in particular, seeks to "Minimise the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and build resilience…through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches" which informs the policy rationale for this Action Plan.

The TAP sets out a practical cross sectoral approach to delivering on:

- The DAERA led Climate Action Plan (CAP) for the carbon budget period 2023 – 2027 and contribution to the CAP targets through increased afforestation.
- Northern Ireland Forestry – A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth.

3.1.4 The action plan establishes a series of actions which have been identified through a co-design process. These actions have been agreed as being practical, appropriate and achievable approaches to achieving the 12% woodland cover by 2050 target.

3.2 Woodland Cover in Northern Ireland

3.2.1 As of 2026 woodlands cover 8.6% of the land area. In relative terms this is a lower level of woodland than other regions of the UK (see table 1) and other countries across Europe. Recognising that context, and accepting that land prices, size of land holdings and cultural practices can and do differ across the UK, this Tree Planting Action Plan seeks to put in place cross sectoral approaches to addressing barriers and as a result increase the current rate of afforestation and woodland cover.

8 https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/climate-change

9 2030 Targets (with Guidance Notes) (Actions with direct relevance to Tree Planting Action Plan 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 21. 22, 23)

Table 1 Total area of woodland, UK, 31 March 2025

Country	Total ha (000s)	Percentage of land (%)
England	**1345**	**10**
Wales	**313**	**15**
Scotland	**1510**	**19**
NI	**119**	**8.6**
UK	**3287**	**14**

3.2.3 DAERA acknowledges that given the scale of woodland creation proposed, much of the land-use change will need to take place from within the current agricultural land use sector, which accounts for just over 75% of the land area of Northern Ireland. Landowners will need to be encouraged to make an informed choice to incorporate land use change to forestry within farm enterprises. Actions to support this decision-making process are incorporated within this plan.

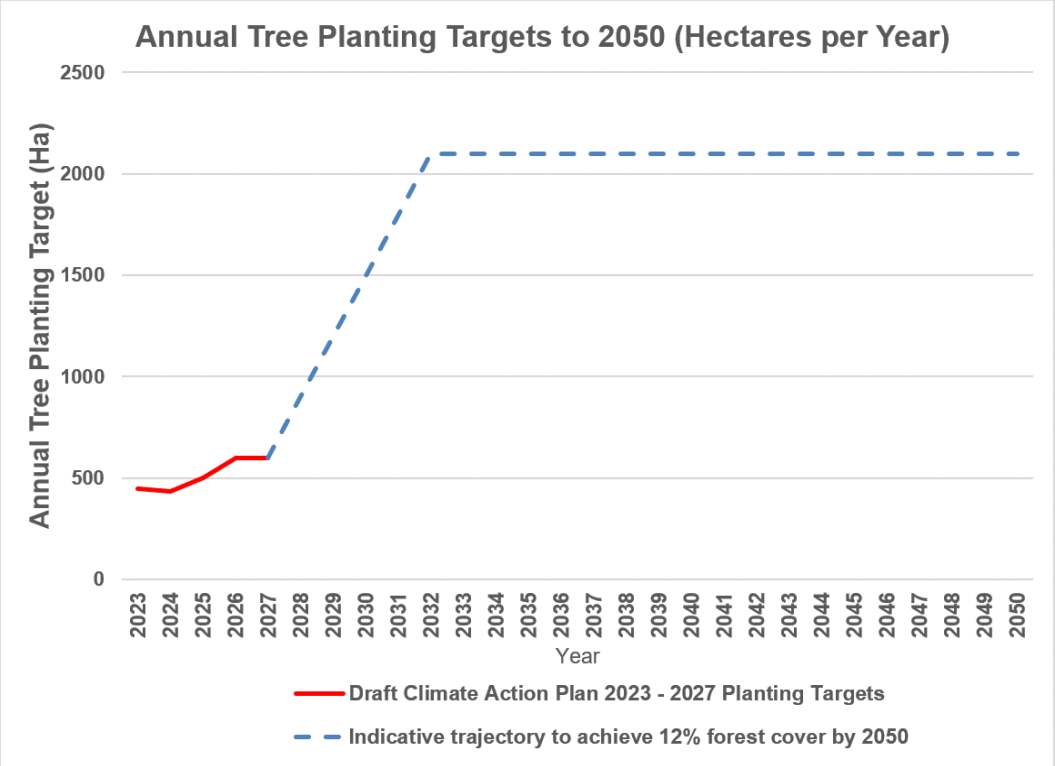
3.3. Northern Ireland Tree Planting Targets and Performance

3.3.1 As outlined in the preceding sections, forests have the potential to make a significant environmental, social and economic contribution to Northern Ireland's society. Despite this Northern Ireland has the lowest level of forest cover in the UK.

3.3.2 The target for woodland creation modelled in the CAP 1 carbon budget is the establishment of 2,585 hectares of new woodland in the 2023-2027 period. To date, 57% or 1,386 hectares have been planted within this budget period with an additional 1,205 hectares required by 2027 to achieve the end of budget period target.

3.3.3 Approximately 50,000 ha of new woodland will need to be created between 2026 and 2050. Rates of planting will have to increase from current rates of 600 ha to levels in excess of 2000 ha a year from 2032 and be maintained to 2050 to achieve levels of afforestation required. This trajectory, as indicatively represented in the graph below, Figure 1 requires collective effort and resources to support afforestation and achieve the current targets for woodland creation. It is important to acknowledge that advice and recommendations in relation to woodland creation rates continues to evolve[10]. The development of this action plan establishes a framework for collaborative delivery bringing together professionalism and skills on a cross-sectoral basis to generate the required momentum.

10 https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/northern-irelands-fourth-carbon-budget/



3.3.4 If Northern Ireland maintains the current rate of woodland creation the target of 12% woodland cover by 2050 will not be achieved. This TAP has been developed to identify strategic actions to better meet afforestation targets through cross-sector co-operation.

3.3.5 TAP 2026 - 2032 has, been developed and agreed through a co-design process as outlined in Annex B. This approach has facilitated engagement across sectors active in Northern Ireland with a forestry remit and interest, reflecting the need for and benefit of stakeholder collaboration in both action plan design and delivery.

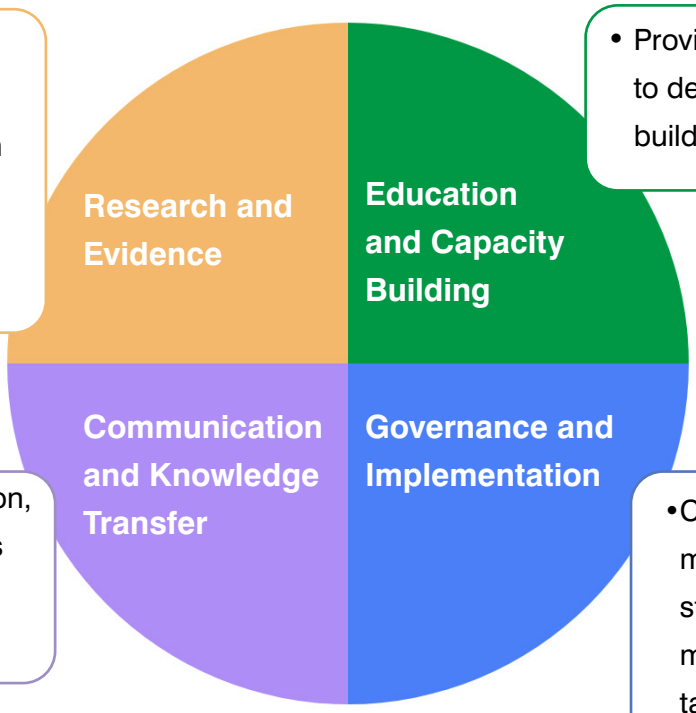
3.4 **Delivery Timelines**: Delivery of the actions will not be sequential with some being deliverable within the shorter timeframes. Other actions will take longer to deliver. That does not mean that there will be a delay in work to progress and implement longer-term actions but merely that there is a recognition they will take longer to deliver, in many instances, work to progress them will take place in parallel with shorter- and medium-term deliverable actions.

4. Tree Planting Action Plan 2026 – 2032

The co-design process identified four strategic priorities as set out below.

- Establishing a NI evidence base for tree planting to inform landowner decision making and increase tree planting rates

- Providing opportunities to develop skills and build sectoral capacity



- Sharing information, raising awareness and building capacity

- Creating the mechanisms and structures to assist in meeting tree planting targets

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: GOVERNANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Strategic Action 1:

Establishment of a delivery working group of key forestry sector stakeholders to collaborate on action plan implementation to remain in place for the duration of the Action Plan 2026 – 2032.

Strategic Action 1 Outcome

- Stakeholder collaboration in delivery of actions.

Strategic Action 2:

Promote policy alignment and delivery within DAERA its internal agencies, central and local government bodies, and external stakeholders.

Strategic Action 2 Outcome

- Reduced duplication and conflicting policy delivery by DAERA.
- An application process that takes account of the seasonality, lead in times and logistics for viable woodland establishment.

Strategic Action 3:

Establish a strategic outreach approach within DAERA.

Strategic Action 3 Outcome

- Unified messaging in a balanced way that promotes and encourages engagement in woodland creation by landowners.

Strategic Action 4:

Design and resource a central woodland creation information portal which is accessible to all landowners and potential investors in woodland creation in Northern Ireland.

Strategic Action 4 Outcome

- A single point of information on supports for woodland creation available through DAERA and delivery partners.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: COMMUNICATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Strategic Action 5:

Develop and implement a sector-based communication and events programme to encourage tree planting across sectors including use of case studies, sectoral workshops and demonstration projects.

Strategic Action 5 Outcome

- Increased landowner awareness of the essential steps and practical operations involved in planting a woodland and sustainable forest management; and promote a better understanding of the benefits of woodland cover and investment opportunities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Strategic Action 6:

Education and Capacity Building

Strategic Action 6 Outcome

- Sector support for workforce planning to provide the skills and capacity required to meet the Climate Action Plan woodland creation target, creating the next generation of forestry contractors, managers and workers across the supply chain. This will grow the confidence of landowners in having access to the necessary skilled workforce to manage woodlands into the future.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

Strategic Action 7:

Provide information on the financial and economic modelling on the investment value of woodlands.

Strategic Action 7 Outcome

- Informed landowner investment decisions that stimulate cultural and behavioural change so that forests are perceived and managed as an asset.
- Increased woodland creation influenced by peer to peer learning.
- Information on the quantifiable benefits of woodlands (economic, business, social, health & wellbeing, environmental, carbon benefits & accounting) including financial returns made available and accessible to landowners and farmers.

Strategic Action 8:

Establish mechanisms for localised opportunity mapping to identify sites with greatest potential to support new woodland creation.

Strategic Action 8 Outcome

- Co-ordinated resource to inform strategic woodland creation and planning and contribute to future planning processes in support of protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

Strategic Action 9:

Develop a process for landowners to record woodland creation.

Strategic Action 9 Outcome

- Recording and reporting that captures progress of woodland creation.

Strategic Action 10:

Enhance stakeholder collaboration to inform emerging and future sector requirements and identify opportunities for joint working.

Strategic Action 10 Outcome

- Enabled partnership delivery of woodland creation projects.
- Increased awareness and application of research findings to inform sustainable forest management and forest expansion in the context of climate change.
- Sustainable forestry management projects promoted and informed by research and evidence

For each of the 10 strategic actions a series of implementing actions have been developed through the co-design process. The implementing actions, delivery timeframes and collaborative delivery partners are detailed in the tables on the following pages.

Governance and Implementation

Strategic Action	Action	Lead Partner	Co-Delivery Partners	Planned Delivery Timeline
1. Establishment of a Delivery Working Group of key forestry sector stakeholders to collaborate on Action Plan implementation to remain in place for the duration of the Action Plan 2026 – 2032.	1.1 Agree Terms of Reference (TOR) which define the roles and membership of the Delivery Working Group, provide secretariat support and consider resourcing.	Forest Service	Key Stakeholders	Sept - Oct 2026
	1.2 The Delivery Working Group will have a role in delivery of and reporting on implementation of the Action Plan as per the agreed TOR, including agreed annual implementation timescales.	Forest Service	Key Stakeholders	2026 - 2032
2 . Promote policy alignment and delivery within DAERA its internal agencies, central and local government bodies, and external stakeholders.	2.1 Establish a DAERA Tree Planting Action Plan policy co-ordination group comprised of relevant DAERA SMT business areas leads to promote afforestation across DAERA.	DAERA	Forest Service	2026 - 2032
	2.2 Forest Service will review the existing application process, including viability of implementing best practice adopted in other jurisdictions.	Forest Service	DAERA & Key Stakeholders	2026 - 2027
	2.3 i. Forest Service will implement pre-application screening and engagement systems. ii. Within the grants process Forest Service will introduce a longer application window and identify mechanisms to facilitate roll over of approvals.	Forest Service	DAERA & Key Stakeholders	2027 Onwards

Strategic Action	Action	Lead Partner	Co-Delivery Partners	Planned Delivery Timeline
	2.4 Forest Service as an Executive Agency of DAERA and non-financial corporation will revise current grant schemes and approval for dedicated funding streams.	Forest Service	DAERA	2027 Onwards
	2.5 Forest Service will identify the options, establishing economic rationale, the legislative and regulatory requirements and timeframes involved along with requirements in relation to affordability for providing multi decade supports.	Forest Service	DAERA	2028 - 2030
	2.6 Work with DAERA Land Use, Land use Change Forestry (LULUCF) and contribute to a policy mapping exercise to identify any duplication or conflicting policy or strategy proposals in respect of tree planting on agricultural land and woodland creation supported by DAERA.	Forest Service	DAERA	2026 onwards
	2.7 Have forestry interests represented on wider DAERA stakeholder groups.	Forest Service	Key Stakeholders	2026 onwards
	2.8 Clear and balanced messaging and information provided by Forest Service and DAERA regarding the impacts on payments along with the benefits, challenges and opportunities of land use change to woodlands.	Forest Service	DAERA	2027 onwards

Strategic Action	Action	Lead Partner	Co-Delivery Partners	Planned Delivery Timeline
3. Establish an integrated Strategic Outreach approach within DAERA.	3.1 Provide training and information to DAERA staff working with farmers in a knowledge transfer and advisory capacity regarding the benefits of different scales and types of on farm tree planting so staff can sign post farmers to further information. i. Identify best practice model for providing balanced and trusted information and encouraging participation. Considering success of existing models applied to peatland restoration and learning from successful project delivery from around the UK and Ireland. ii. Roll out at appropriate scale.	Forest Service	UFU/AFBI UFU/CAFRE	i. 2026 ii. 2027
	3.2 Promote a forestry championing approach providing evidence informed input to relevant planning and decision-making processes across government and the public sector.	Forest Service	DAERA & Key stakeholders	2027 onwards
4. Design and resource a central woodland information portal which is accessible to all landowners and potential investors in woodland creation in NI.	4.1 Create a one stop shop for those who want to find out what supports are available for woodland creation, incorporating best practice learning.	Forest Service	Confor/UFU/ WT	2026 - 2027

Communication and Knowledge Transfer

Strategic Action	Action	Lead Partner	Co-Delivery Partners	Planned Delivery Timeline
5. Develop and implement a sector-based Communication and Events programme to encourage tree planting across sectors including use of case studies, sectoral workshops and demonstration projects	5.1 Agree a schedule of events, at which we will promote forestry, and share information on the benefits and challenges of forests and woodland creation.	Forest Service	Key Stakeholders	Sept - Oct 2026
	5.2 Host annual events at afforestation or reforestation site to demonstrate practical operations and steps for those considering planting woodlands.	Forest Service	Key Stakeholders	2026 - 2032
	5.3 Host annual events to demonstrate low impact silvicultural systems including natural regeneration for woodland expansion to share experience and learning.			2027-2032
	5.4 Engage with farm businesses that have diversified by integrating woodland including agro forestry as part of their business model to share lived experience on the practical financial considerations and implications of farm woodlands through on-site visits.	Forest Service, UFU & WT	Key Stakeholders and AFBI	2027-2032
	5.5 Throughout the lifetime of the TAP, develop and publish case studies of landowners that have planted woodlands so they can share their motivations, lived and learned experience, benefits and challenges to provide a balanced insight into tree planting.	Forest Service & UFU	Key Stakeholders and AFBI	2027-2032
	5.6 Promote best practice across the sector and with new woodland owners embedding awareness and practice of bio-security across the woodland creation supply chain.	Forest Service (Plant Health)	Key Stakeholders CAFRE, AFBI	2027 onwards

Education and Capacity Building

Strategic Action	Action	Lead Partner	Co-Delivery Partners	Planned Delivery Timeline
6. Education and Capacity Building	6.1 Prepare proposals to address identified education and skills gaps including education on forestry and apprenticeships opportunities over the Action Plan implementation timeframe.	Forest Service & CAFRE	Key Stakeholders	2026 - 2032
	6.2 i. Host an annual workshop for those with an interest in tree production on Planting Stock / Forest Reproductive Material (FRM) requirements and seed collection and	CAFRE/Forest Service Plant Health	Stakeholders	2027 onwards
	ii. support development of a standalone NI Nursery Working Group to share experience and skills to build capacity and knowledge with a focus on traceability and sustainability to meet bespoke and specialised requirements for localised scale and demands.	CAFRE/Forest Service Plant Health	Stakeholders & AFBI	2026 & ongoing
	6.3 Highlight opportunities and support stakeholder participation in knowledge sharing networks across UK, Ireland and Europe	Forest Service & AFBI	Key Stakeholders	2027 onwards

Building Research and Evidence

Strategic Action	Action	Lead Partner	Co-Delivery Partners	Planned Delivery Timeline
7. To provide information on the financial and economic modelling on the investment value of woodlands.	7.1 Host annual webinars on the Woodland Carbon Code and other opportunities for income from nature products.	Confor	Forest Service & Key stakeholders	2027 - 2032
	7.2 Collate and disseminate information on the tax implications of woodland creation in relation to agricultural business including that relating to inheritance tax and farm enterprise succession planning.	Confor/ UFU	Stakeholders	2027 - 2032
	7.3 Share objective research and evidence on the economics of afforestation to inform land use decision making by landowners (private & public).	AFBI/Forest Service	Stakeholders	2027 - 2032
8. Establish mechanisms for localised opportunity mapping to identify sites with greatest potential to support new woodland creation.	8.1 Work with stakeholders to identify areas of land suitable for woodland creation.	Forest Service	Local Authorities & Key stakeholders	2028 - 2030
	8.2 Establish a project with stakeholders and produce maps of areas where tree planting can protect and enhance the environment and inform landowners' decision making and potential support mechanisms.	Forest Service	DAERA & Stakeholders	2027 - 2030
9. Develop a process for land owners to record woodland creation.	9.1 Collate information on the location and extent of woodland creation delivered within Northern Ireland which is regularly updated.	Forest Service	Stakeholders	2027 - 2030

Strategic Action	Action	Lead Partner	Co-Delivery Partners	Planned Delivery Timeline
10. Enhance stakeholder collaboration to inform emerging and future sector requirements and identify opportunities for joint working.	10.1 Enable stakeholders to develop project proposals by providing information and guidance for woodland creation project applications that could be funded and delivered through partnerships including opportunities for North South and East West collaborations.	Forest Service & DAERA	Stakeholders	2028-2032
	10.2 Commissioning and dissemination of research findings relevant to the forestry sector.	CSAO & Forest Service	Key Stakeholders	2026 onwards
	10.3 Organise at least two forestry conferences and participate in events organised by key stakeholders to promote afforestation and share findings of forest research relevant to Northern Ireland.	Forest Service/ Chief Scientific Advisor	Key Stakeholders	2026-2032

5. Governance and Implementation

5.1 The DAERA Minister and Forest Service have been clear from the outset of the co-design process leading to the development of the TAP for 2026-2032 that it is a cross-sectoral plan and it will need a cross-sectoral approach to its governance and implementation. Achievement of woodland targets is a long-term commitment; this action plan provides a framework for stakeholders to collaborate across a range of actions in pursuit of the overall target to 2050, recognising the inter-generational nature of forestry as a nature based solution to help address climate change and biodiversity loss.

5.2 The following table sets out the governance and implementation structures which will be put in place to provide the required co-ordination and cross-sectoral implementation:

Element	Function
Stakeholder Delivery	To re-engage with the key stakeholders two times per year to: • Review Progress • Assess latest information or developments with the potential to impact positively or negatively on the implementation of the TAP.

Element	Function
Lead Partner	Identification of the most appropriate cross sectoral stakeholder to lead on each action.
Task and Finish Groups	Co-delivery groups formed as and when required from stakeholders (and including external expertise if required) to complete and deliver short or timebound strategic actions
Annual Progress Review	FS led engagement with the stakeholders and strategic action leads to confirm progress
Annual Statement of Progress	Annual statement of progress against the Action Plan and the overall TAP

6. Annex A - Strategic Context

DAERA is the Northern Ireland Executive Department with responsibility for climate change, green growth and forestry (amongst a wider range of responsibilities). The context for the TAP is set by the following DAERA led policies, strategies and programmes and a range of UK and Global policies. They are summarised below:

Policy/Strategy	Summary and Context for the TAP 2026 - 2032
The Paris Agreement	Adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris in December 2015, and entering into force in November 2016, the agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. Its key ambition is the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions and achieving net zero by 2050 in addition to limiting temperature increase to 1.5 degrees c.

Policy/Strategy	Summary and Context for the TAP 2026 - 2032
Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework – UN Convention on Biological Diversity	This framework supports the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and seeks to build on the Convention's previous strategic plans, setting out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. Among its key elements are 4 goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030 with the Framework recognising climate change as one of five direct drivers with the largest global impact which has caused change in nature. Other notable targets are the conservation of 30% of terrestrial and marine habitats by 2030 (known as 30 by 30).
NI Climate Change Act (NI) 2022	The Climate Change Act sets out the long-term vision and framework for addressing climate change in an ambitious and sustainable way through a set of national targets for 2030, 2040 and 2050 for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It further makes provision for a system of carbon budgeting, and details on reporting duties and requires biodiversity impact to be considered in setting the carbon budgets. Where practicable, the Act advocates the use of nature-based solutions that enhance biodiversity, protect or restore ecosystems to aid carbon mitigation efforts plans and policies to achieve the carbon budget.
NI CAP	NI's first CAP was created under the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022. Its purpose is to set out how the region will cut greenhouse emissions and reach net zero by 2050. It focuses on the first carbon budget period (2023 - 2027) and outlines the role for forestry in contributing to the journey to net zero through increased rates of afforestation. The plan acknowledges that planting rates must be significantly increased in the coming years to meet projected woodland creation targets.

Policy/Strategy	Summary and Context for the TAP 2026 - 2032
Sustainability for the Future – DAERA's Plan to 2050	This plan to 2050 sets out the purpose of DAERA as '*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*' It identifies Climate Change as one of the strategic risks to be addressed over the period and establishes four strategic priorities, two of which set the context for the TAP: • Economic Growth: To enhance our food, forestry, fishery and farming sectors using efficient and environmentally friendly sustainable models which support economic growth. • Natural Environment: To protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all.
The Draft Nature Recovery Strategy	The draft strategy sets out the following: 2032 Mission: To take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet by conserving, restoring and sustainably using biodiversity. 2050 Vision: Biodiversity across NI is substantially restored and regenerated. Our rich and diverse natural environment is thriving, resilient, and adapting to climate change as well as contributing to climate change mitigation. Everyone understands the benefits and importance of biodiversity and is playing their role in the stewardship of nature in NI for future generations. Through its commitment to sustainable woodland cover, the TAP can contribute to this mission and vision, having been identified as a proposed (additional) Nature Recovery Strategy action.
DAERA Corporate Plan 2025-2027	The Corporate Plan sets out the following vision: 'Delivering a net zero positive future, supporting sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities.' It establishes a range of priorities for the Department across 2025 - 2027 including 'tackling and responding to Climate Change together in a fair and just way.'

Policy/Strategy	Summary and Context for the TAP 2026 - 2032
Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)	The EIP prioritises trees and woodland as a critical component of nature recovery and climate resilience, aiming to increase NI's woodland cover to at least 9% (124,000 hectares) by 2030, with the long-term goal of 12% by 2050. It recognises the potential for increased woodland in creating new habitats and enhancing biodiversity as part of a wider nature recovery network (p. 44). It notes a series of strategic benefits which are also reflected in this action plan, including climate action, water management and conservation.
Forests for Our Future Programme	Launched in 2020, the Forests for Our Future Programme aims to plant 18 million trees and 9,000 hectares of new woodland in NI by 2030. This supports tree planting for environmental, economic and carbon reduction purposes by encouraging landowners to create new woodlands and provides incentives to create new woodland.
Green Growth Strategy	In 2021 DAERA led the development of a Green Growth Strategy which is currently in draft form, having been consulted on and awaiting Executive approval. The draft aims to balance climate, the environment and the economy and will require both government and the wider society to work in collaboration on strategy implementation. This reflects the collaborative nature of the TAP.
Green Skills Action Plan	While led by Dept. of the Economy, this action plan sets out a series of actions which aim to provide a roadmap for integrating green competencies into education and training and deliver a resilient and adaptable workforce to meet the current and future demands of the green economy. It recognises the need for flexibility in its approach, including ongoing engagement with industry stakeholders.

7. Annex B - Tree Planting Action Plan Co-Design Process

1. To support its team and to bring independence to the process FS developed Terms of Reference for the co-design process and engaged the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to support it to deliver and facilitate the processes leading to the development of the TAP.

2. The co-design process stages and processes are set out in the following table:

Stage	Co-Design Process
1	Initial briefing of co-design stakeholders
2	Semi-structured engagements (by SIB with FS in attendance)
3	Development of a Co-design Position Paper (establishing current barriers and potential opportunities)
4	Co-design Workshop attended by stakeholders (30th March 2026)
5	Development of draft Tree Planting Action Plan
6	Co-design review of the draft Tree Planting Action Plan by stakeholders
7	Review of draft Tree Planting Action Plan
8	Submission of the Tree Planting Action Plan to the DAERA Minister

3. The process was initiated through a meeting in October 2025 with five key stakeholders which have a remit, responsibility for or interest in tree planting in NI. They were:

- Confederation of Forest Industries UK (CONFOR)

- Scottish Woodlands
- Woodland Trust NI
- Balcas
- Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU)

Post initial discussions in October 2025, FS communicated with the five stakeholders to confirm that a co-design process was being initiated by FS supported by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB).

4. Good co-design practice recognises that flexibility can and should be introduced to the process if required. During the stakeholder engagement sessions, a number of additional stakeholders were identified, and it was agreed that they would also be included in the initial scoping phase. Those organisations are as follows:

    - Local Authorities (Mid Ulster District Council; Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council)
    - NI Water
    - CAFRE
    - AFBI
    - Institute of Chartered Foresters
    - DAERA Farming with Nature

5. FS invited all stakeholders engaged at Stage 2 to a co-design workshop (30 March 2026). Additional stakeholders were invited based on the outputs of the engagements.

8. Annex C - Glossary Of Terms

AFBI	Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute
CAFRE	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
CAP	Climate Action Plan
CONFOR	Confederation of Forest Industries
CSAO	Chief Scientific Advisors Office
DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
EIP	Environmental Improvement Plan
FRM	Forest Reproductive Material
FS	Forest Service
LULUCF	Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry
SIB	Strategic Investment Board
SMT	Senior Management Team
TAP	Tree Planting Action Plan
UFU	Ulster Farmers Union
UKFS	United Kingdom Forestry Standard

FOREST SERVICE
An tSeirbhís Foraoisí

Photos included have been provided by John Burr, Des Campbell, Jerry Hawe, Dawson Jones, William Magowan, Scottish Woodlands, Colin Reilly

Northern Ireland Tree Planting Action Plan 2026 - 2032

A Plan for Woodland Creation

An Agency within the Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Gníomhaireacht de chuid na Roinne
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

An Agency wi'in the Depairtment o
Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Standard

26.27.052