
Uplift Submission to The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine public consultation survey on the future of forests in Ireland

27.04.2022

Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has launched a public consultation survey on the future of forests in Ireland.

Uplift welcomes the opportunity to engage in the process of helping shape a new shared vision and develop a new strategy for trees and forests in Ireland.

In preparation for this submission, Uplift members submitted their views and opinions in relation to their experience of trees and forests in Ireland and why we plant forests, the places they are planted, the types of trees we plant, and how forests are managed

Over a period of one week, 712 people took the survey - an indication that there is significant interest in this particular subject within our community.

Uplift - A People-Powered Community

Uplift is a people-powered campaigning community of more than 340,000 people who take coordinated action together for a more progressive, equal, socially just and democratic Ireland. Uplift members come from all over Ireland and have many different experiences and backgrounds.

Uplift members seek to bridge the gap between members of the public and decision-makers through powerful technology, events and consultation through surveys for submission such as this one.

Read more at <https://www.uplift.ie>

Our Community's Support Trees

Uplift members have a long track record in campaigning to conserve nature. Together we're helping bees, protecting Ireland's oldest oak trees and limiting the spraying of poisonous chemicals. And we've fought hard to ban fracking, excessive hedge cutting and stop plastic pollution.

We know that it's bad news for trees - more are being cut down than being planted, and Ireland is already the least wooded country in Europe. In the fight against climate change and for our biodiversity, we need more trees. Our community believes that trees are amazing! Not only do they clean the air and soak up toxic carbon dioxide - they also protect animals, insects, plants, soil and give us shelter.

As Uplift members, thousands of us have got together and campaigned for the survival of Ireland's forests and trees over the past five years, and our community is continuing to work hard to protect existing woodland.

This is how we've helped protect trees:

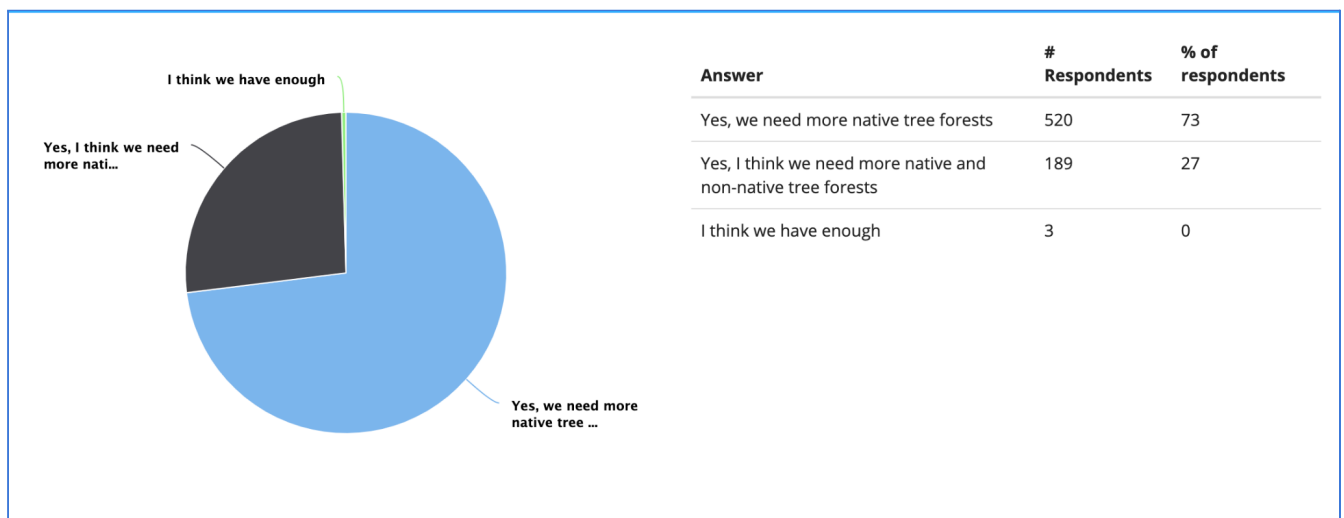
- This Spring, with help from Future Forests Garden Centre in West Cork, and hundreds of members who chipped in to sponsor trees, it was possible to plant 600 native Irish trees in West Cork
- Uplift members campaigned to have Toon Woods Toon, near Macroom, designated as a Natural Heritage Area and we raised hundreds of euros to get legal advice on cutting through the red tape that was preventing the NHA from being applied.
- 18,000 of us signed a petition demanding that County Councils employ a qualified arborist to protect urban trees and that no trees are cut in public spaces without prior public consultation.
- Over 13,000 of us joined the campaign asking the Minister of Transport to put in place measures to avoid unnecessary cutting down of trees when the proposed Bus Connects Project is implemented.
- And in Kerry we campaigned to allow the public to enjoy recreational time on public footpaths in privately owned forest spaces.

Our People-Powered Plan for Trees and Forests

Uplift Member Survey conducted 21st to 27th March 2022

Ireland Needs More Trees

- Almost all members of our community think that we need more trees in Ireland.
- 73% of those agreed that we need more native tree forests.
- Only 27% think that we need more native and non-native tree forests.
- Only 3 of our respondents believe that Ireland has enough trees.



All of us believe that trees are amazing. Not only do they clean the air and soak up toxic carbon dioxide - they also protect animals, insects, plants, soil and give us shelter, as well as provide beautiful places we can exercise and spend time with friends and family.

The main reasons that people gave for wanting more trees in Ireland

1. Carbon Capture
2. Biodiversity
3. Recreation
4. Building Materials

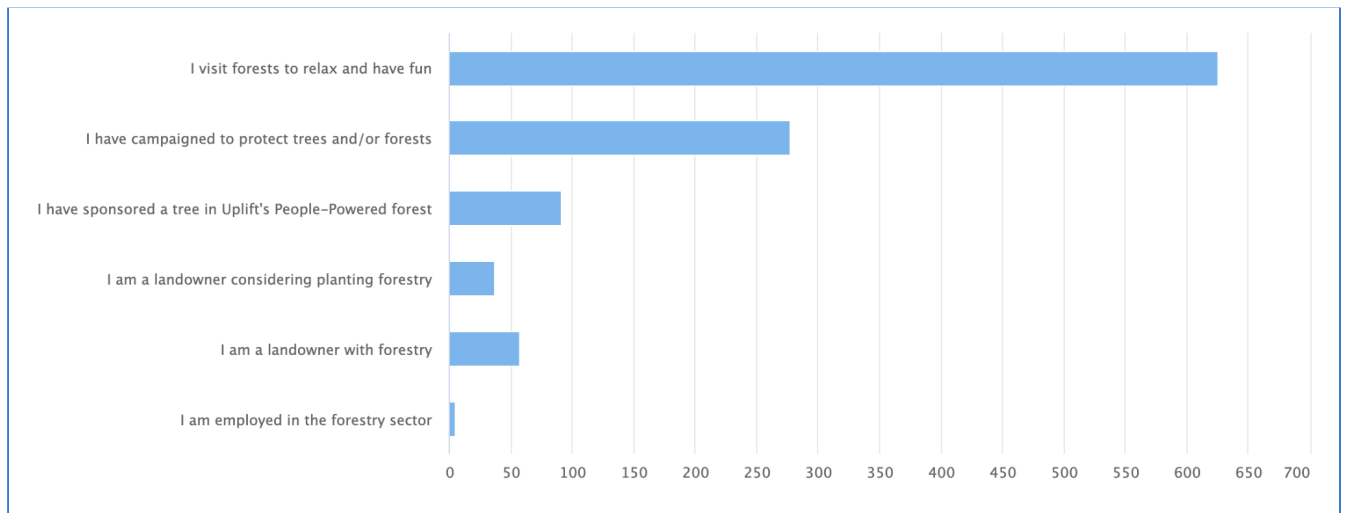
The reasons that our community gave for wanting more trees are summarised here::

- Because there's not enough

- It would improve air quality
- Globally trees are being cut down, We can not recover these forests, but if we grow more trees in Ireland we will go a small way to helping the situation
- To increase biodiversity, particularly as a habitat for insects. There is a global biodiversity crisis. We need more native forests as they provide much-needed habitat for native wildlife. Non-native forests can be a desert for wildlife and biodiversity. We have such a tiny amount of good quality native forests.
- We need to act now to address our CO2 emissions. Ireland needs native forests for tackling Climate Change e.g. Absorbing and storing carbon
- Protecting against flooding.
- Native forests are so much better for People e.g. providing spaces for health, well-being and fun.
- Only a small percentage of Ireland is forested and trees are so important for our ecosystems, biodiversity & sustaining life on our planet.
- Forests are where we can connect to nature, be immersed in it, exercise, explore and have fun.
- Trees are important for wildlife and nature, reducing carbon dioxide and providing oxygen so life In general
- Forests are beautiful places to discover with the family
- Trees have many sustainable uses, e.g. in the construction and furnishing industry as well as protecting biodiversity and quality of human life and absorbing carbon.
- We have a responsibility to future generations to reforest with native trees.
- Native trees support more insects and don't acidify the land and water as do spruce.
- Trees capture carbon for the earth and reduce climate change.
- Trees produce building wood locally.
- We need them to capture carbon and for biodiversity as well as for the health and recreational aspects.
- Commercial uses are also important
- Our biodiversity is very important
- Native trees provide shelter and food for indigenous animals and birds
- Trees help prevent soil erosion and give protection against the weather, particularly wind.
- Where i live in Co Mayo there's an Eco-Disaster happening right now. Farmers and councils have devastated the tree population at an increasing rate over the past 10yrs, cutting down 10s of 000s of trees. There are few mature trees remaining and there's a mania for 'tidying up' the country, cutting any over-hanging branch for fear of injury claims. Hedges are also dying out rapidly from aggressive over-cutting. On top of all that the native Ash has started to suffer badly from the Ash 'die-back' disease.
- Education is needed about the importance of trees and hedges.
- Trees give us good air, are home to birds, and are beautiful. They need to be protected and more of them planted.
- Native trees take time to grow, but they provide variety and beauty in our forests and do not deprive the undergrowth of light.
- Because there is a climate and biodiversity crisis so we need to move away from a monoculture crop approach to forestry and focus on native woodlands and the ecosystems they support.

- We don't want just 'managed' forests that are there to earn money for private interests.
- Ireland has the second lowest tree cover in Europe, and there isn't a good attitude to trees in this country, where cutting down trees is a national sport. Native trees are good for the environment but, crucially, they provide the right environment for biodiversity. Commercial forests are empty of life, as they provide no habitat for native species of plants and animals, and are an eyesore when cut down.
- Trees are important for mental health and healing.
- Forests are a good use of land that cannot be used for anything else.

Our Relationship with Forests

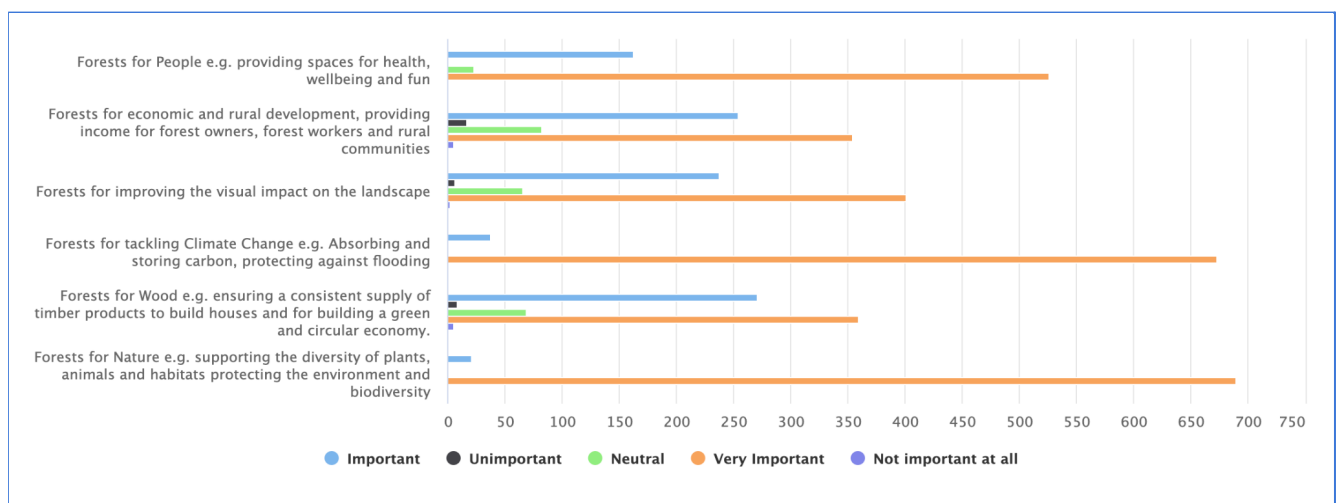


Almost everyone surveyed visits forests to relax and have fun - some use forests for several reasons. More than a third of people who use forests care for them and have taken action to protect them. One way of doing this is by sponsoring a tree. More than ten percent of respondents have sponsored a tree in the Uplift forest. Landowners and people employed in the forestry sector also use the forests for recreational purposes as well as having an interest in their protection.

Reasons that Forests are Important to us

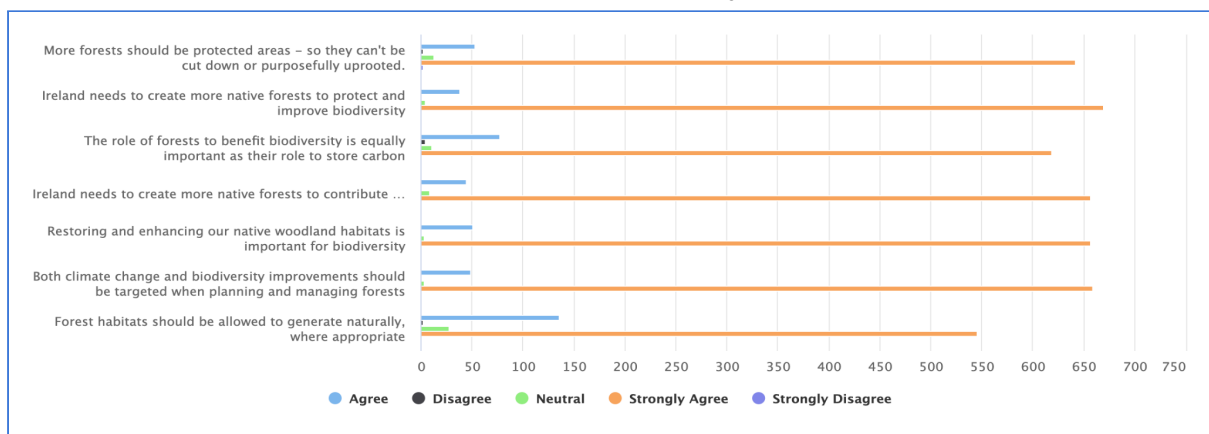
Most Uplift members believe that forests are very important for the following reasons (in order of importance):

1. For nature
2. For tackling climate change
3. For the health and wellbeing of people
4. For improving the visual impact of the landscape
5. For wood for building
6. For economic and rural development



Sustainable Management of Forests

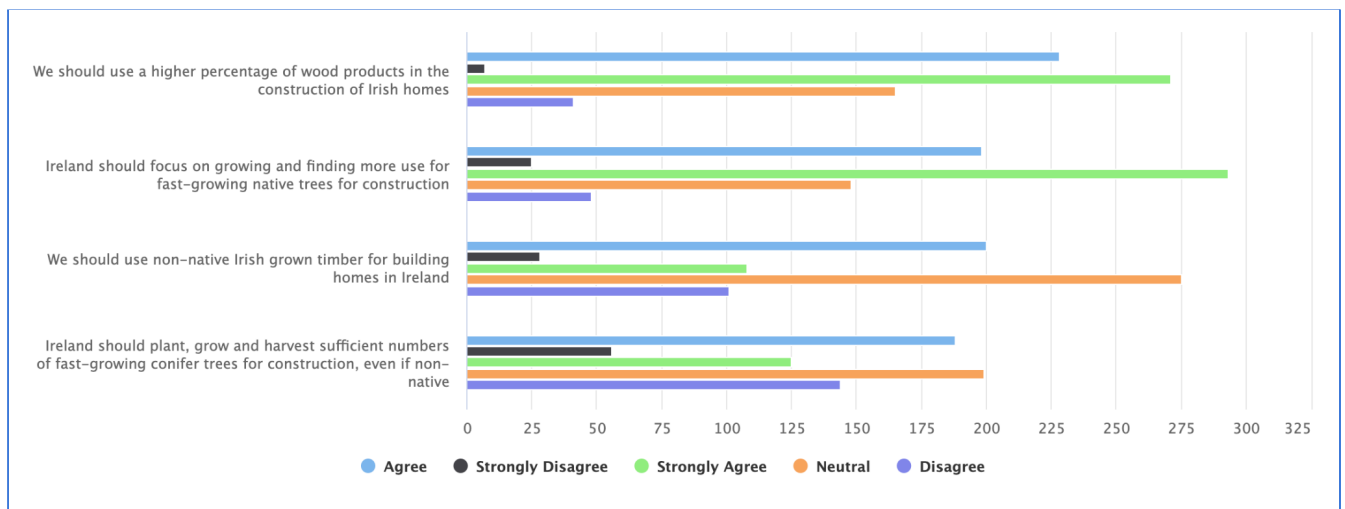
Most Uplift member strongly agree that when managed sustainably, forests and trees can help tackle climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and for storing carbon in trees. Trees can also help increase biodiversity and environmental protection.



The use of Trees as Building Materials

Trees can be a more sustainable renewable building material compared to concrete and steel. However, much of the deforestation across Ireland has been due to the exploitation of timber. New forest expansion has mainly been non-native trees for construction, furniture or energy production - which means that we import less timber from abroad.

- 70% of people strongly agree or agree that a higher percentage of wood products should be used in the construction of homes in Ireland.
- A similar proportion also strongly agree or agree that Ireland should focus on growing and finding more use for fast growing native trees for building houses.

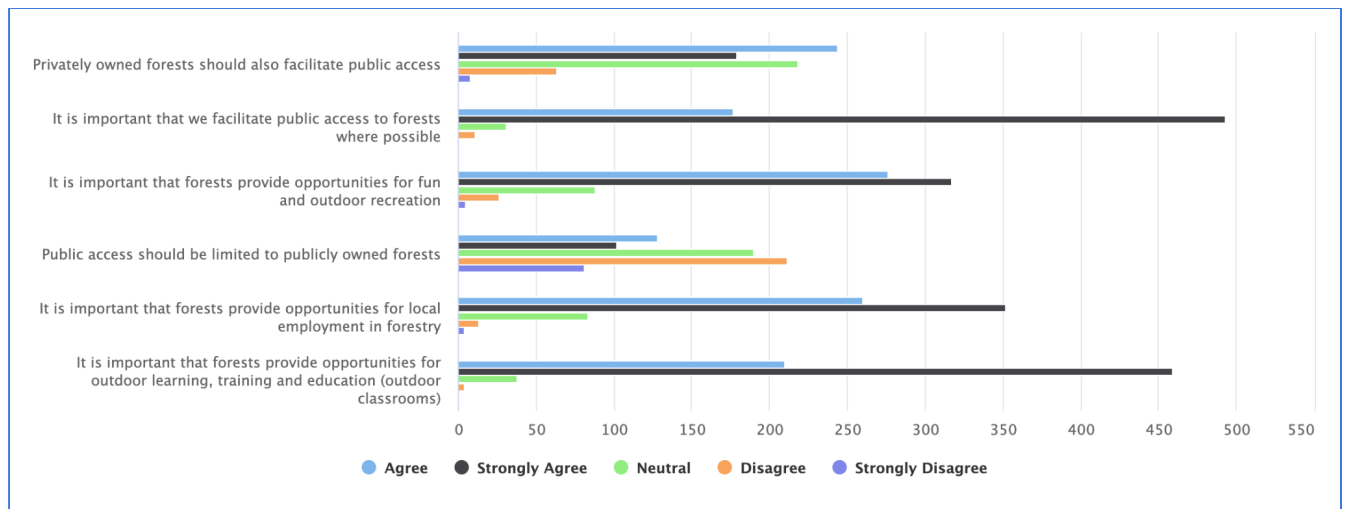


Forests Make us Healthy and Happy

Between 60% and 70% of us

- say that it is important that the public has access to forests
- that forests provide outdoor learning, training and educational opportunities for communities.

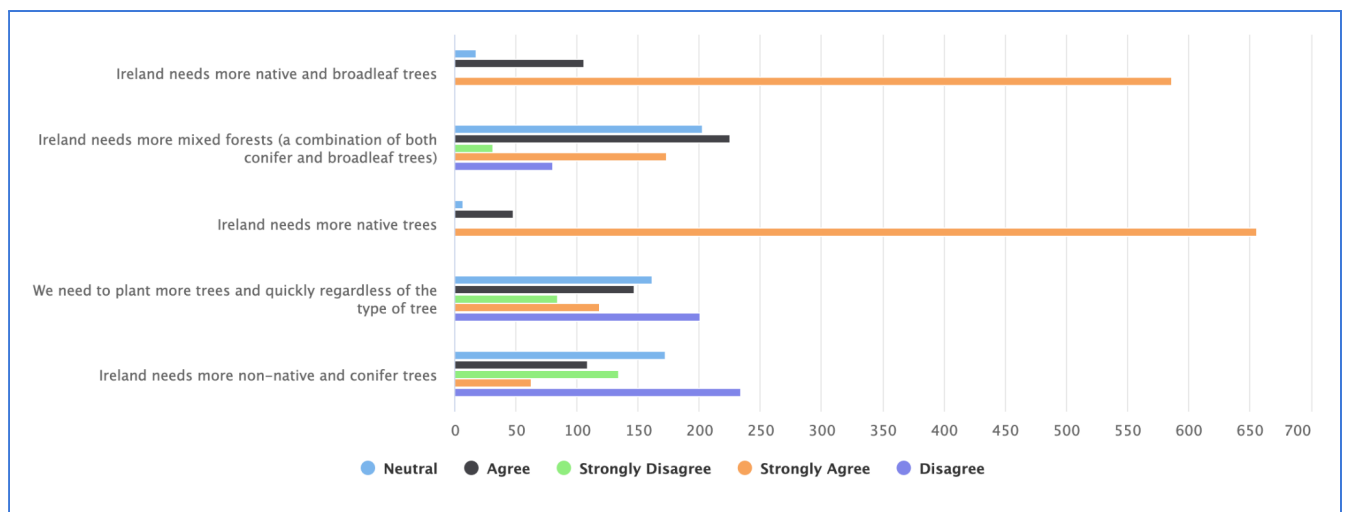
The respondents had a mixed response to allowing the public to access privately owned forests with around half of people taking a neutral stance on the issue.



The Type of Trees We Want in Ireland

11% of Ireland is covered in forest: Roughly 73 % of this is non-native trees ie. conifers and the remaining 27% is broadleaf trees (flat leafed, with seeds), with only 2% of them being native trees.

- 92% of people want more native broadleaf trees planted in Ireland
- More people than not, do not want more conifer, non-native trees planted in Ireland
- It is important to people what type of trees are planted



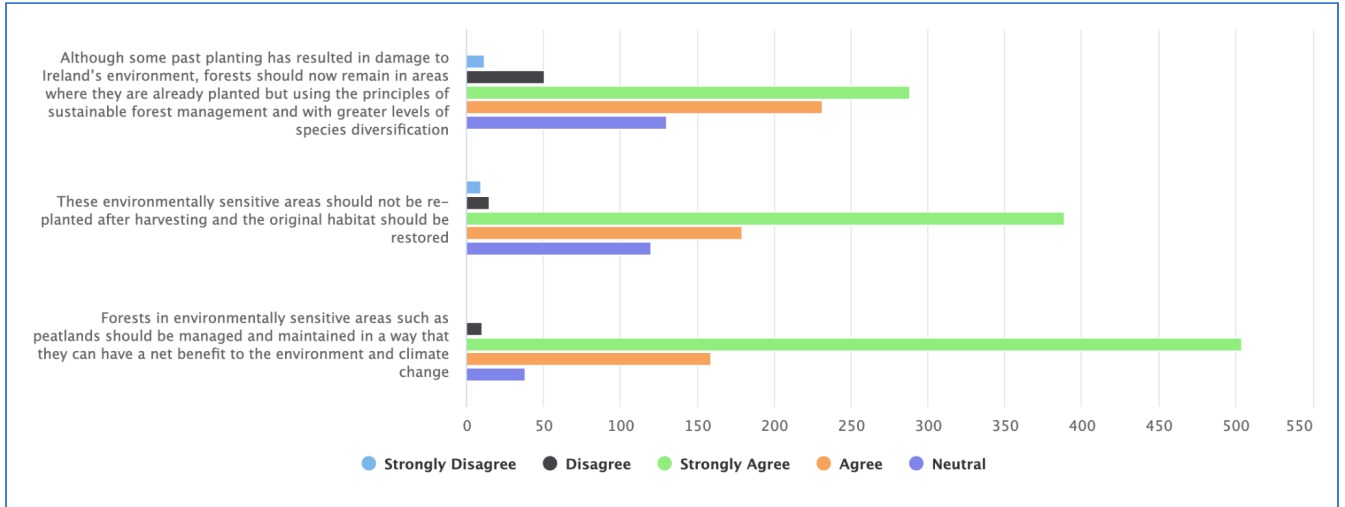
Where Should our Forests Be Planted?

Ireland has increased the area covered in trees from 1.5% to 11% during the last 100 years. But some of the forests planted during this time were planted in the wrong place, particularly on places like peatlands.

- 70% of people strongly agree that environmentally sensitive areas planted with forests should be managed and maintained so that

they benefit the environment and help counter the effects of climate change

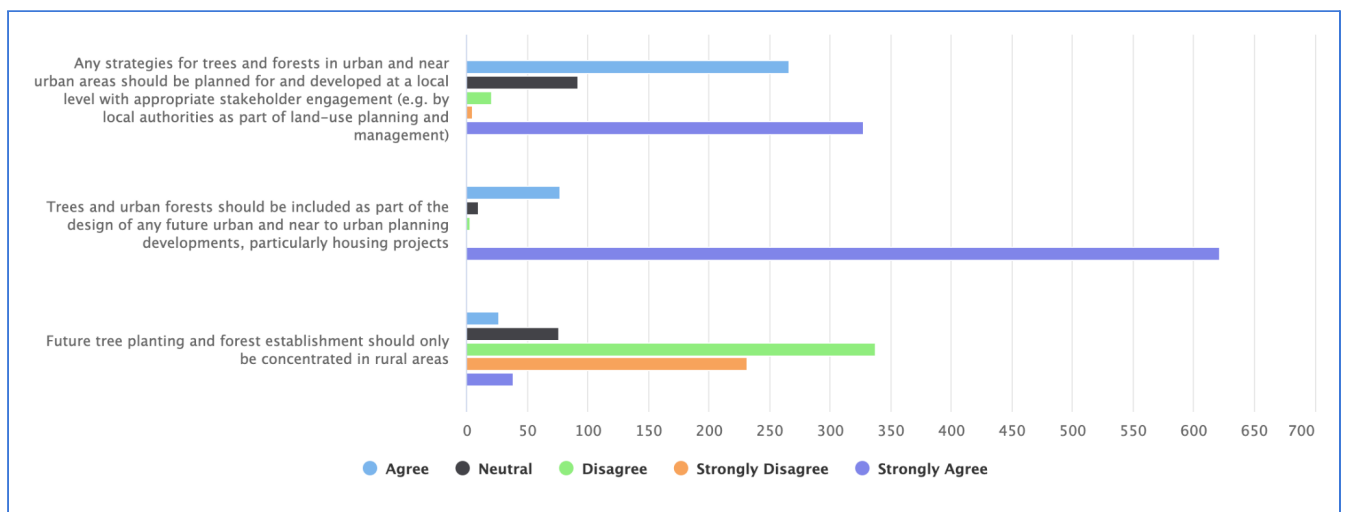
- More than half of respondents think that environmentally sensitive areas should not be re-planted once felled, and the land should be returned to the natural habitat.



Forests Can Benefit Communities

Most Uplift members agree that green spaces can provide significant physical, mental, social and health and wellbeing benefits to society, and benefit communities by providing access to a resource that can really benefit mental and physical health.

- Almost 90% of us think that trees and forests should be included in the design of any future urban planning development, particularly housing projects.
- More than 80% of us strongly agree or agree that any strategies for trees and forests in urban areas should be planned for and developed at a local level with opportunities for local communities to have a say.

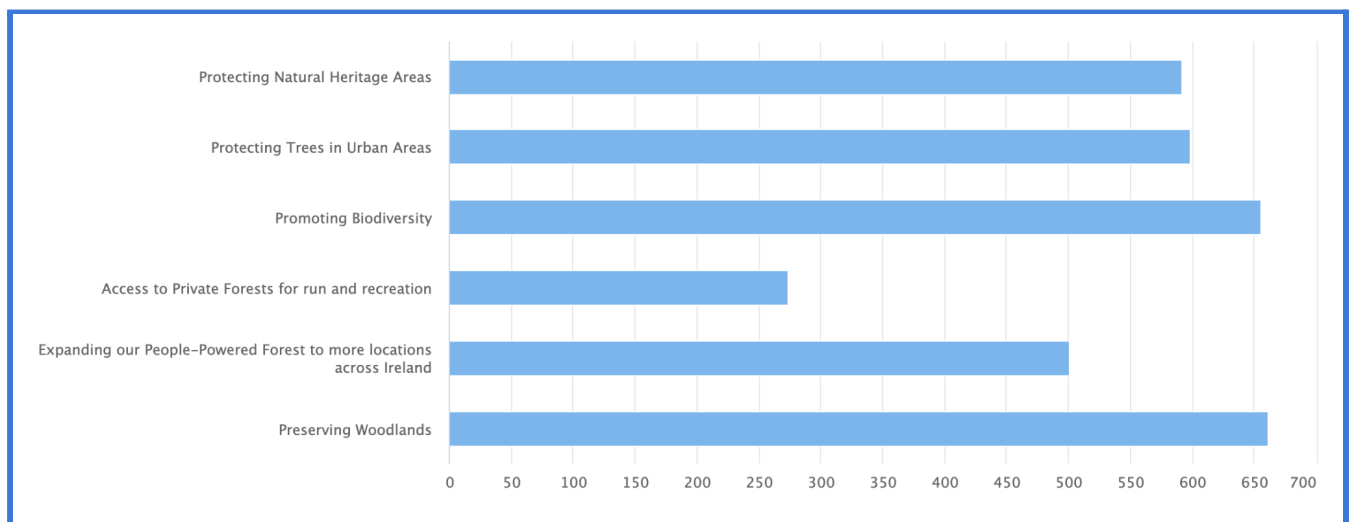


The Next Steps for our Trees and Forests

As a people-powered campaigning organisation we empower and connect our members so they can take action on issues they care about. From the above answers to the survey, it is clear that the majority of our members really care about the future of Ireland's trees and forests and are keen to be more involved in their planning and protection.

We asked our members what they would like to campaign on next. The top 3 are:

- Preserve woodland
- Promote biodiversity
- Protect Trees in Urban Areas



We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the future of Ireland's trees, forests and woodlands. As a group of people who have campaigned for many years on these issues, we are grateful to have a space where we can have our say.

Please do not hesitate to contact Uplift if you require any further information.

Contact:

Alex Barton
Fundraising and Member Support Coordinator
Uplift
E: alex@uplift.ie
T: 01 513 3043
13 Lower Dorset St, Dublin, DO1