1. Summary

Proposals are invited for the role of a programme ambassador on the new “Future of UK Treescapes Programme”. This interdisciplinary programme is being led by NERC and jointly funded with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Treescapes are terrestrial landscapes in which trees play a significant role. Treescapes can be found in different settings, ranging from forest to plantation, and in agricultural and urban environments. The UK Treescapes programme aims to deliver new environmental, socio-economic and cultural understanding of the treescapes of the UK with respect to (i) the type and extent of these treescapes and the functions and services they provide for the environment and to society; (ii) their vulnerability and adaptive capacities given current and future environmental change; and (iii) plausible social, economic, cultural, technological and environmental pathways to enhance the extent, quality and adaptive capacity of these treescapes for the benefits of the environment and society.

The programme ambassador is expected to be largely an external facing role with the following responsibilities: 1) external communication of the programme and engagement with key stakeholders, 2) coordination and integration of funded projects, 3) monitoring and reporting of programme delivery progress, and 4) organisation of programme events including annual programme conferences.

Applications are open to researchers from all disciplines represented by NERC, AHRC and ESRC remits. Successful applicant will demonstrate the ability to engage diverse research and stakeholder communities.

Funding of up to £500k (80% FEC) is available over the 4 years of the programme. It is expected that the successful applicant will spend a minimum of 0.2FTE (up to 0.5FTE) in this role. The latest expected start for the role is 1 September 2020.
2. Background

2.1 Strategic context

Landscapes across the UK will be changed dramatically by 2050. They need to become more resilient to pressures such as changing climate, disease, competing land use demands, in order to reverse the decline in biodiversity and environmental quality.

Alongside deep cuts in anthropogenic carbon emissions, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recognises the potential of treescape restoration to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation1. The UK government has committed to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and afforestation is expected to play a key role in delivering the final and hardest part of this target2. The UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC) recommends planting at least 30,000 hectares per year (90-120 million trees) of broadleaf, mixed or conifer woodland – an immediate and substantial acceleration from the current 9,000 hectares per year – which will increase UK forest cover from 13% to at least 17% by 20503.

Recent radical changes in UK agricultural policy introduce a “public money for public goods” approach4, which favours the range of “public goods” delivered by multipurpose landscapes. The 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) espouses a move from existing biodiversity net gain to a broader “environmental net gain” requirement that recognises the diversity of benefits, trade-offs and synergies of landscape changes. The Natural Capital Committee has advised the government to consider both the type of ecosystem services and benefits that should be compensated for and location of that compensation5, emphasising the potential for using trees in such net gain schemes and the potential for providing benefit to those who experience the lowest quality environments. For example, the £640 million Nature for Climate Fund announced in the Budget 2020 will invest in projects including the Northern Forest, which will plant 50 million trees in community forests in the north where the woodland cover is substantially lower than the England average6.

Forest and woodland management must also be responsive to different future societal needs and consider community, cultures, and histories with regards to the changing UK treescape. National and devolved nation policies, addressing international climate change and biodiversity goals (e.g. the proposed Environment Bill), emphasise the enhancement and expansion of their treescapes, while simultaneously setting ambition targets to create regionally-specific cultural, social, and economic goods.

A common theme across all these policies is the need to recognise the multiple environmental, social, economic, and cultural benefits which treescapes can deliver, which

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1 IPCC (2019) Special Report on Climate Change and Land
3 CCC (2020) Land use: Policies for a Net Zero UK
5 Natural Capital Committee (2019) Advice to government on net environmental gain
6 The Northern Forest
will drive innovation and delivery of a bio-economy contributing strongly towards energy production, food security, material science, public health, community assets and recreation.

Opportunities to meet these challenges must work with the UK’s diverse climate, geology, topography, and land use, whilst aligning with national and local policies to ensure that many different types of treescapes are envisaged and supported by stakeholders for the future. These opportunities include resilient commercially productive forests, as well as semi-natural woodlands, trees on farms, riparian woodlands, and urban trees and woods.

2.2 Future of the UK Treescape programme

Trees provide multiple goods and services that support the UK’s economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing. There have been early attempts to assess the ecosystem value of parts of UK treescapes, many of them initially driven by commercial or carbon value, but now also encompassing water and flood management, cultural services, and benefits to physical and mental health. However, many of the functions and services provided by trees in different landscapes remain poorly understood or quantified, particularly with respect to how they change over time and their effectiveness in patchy landscapes.

These treescapes will be exposed increasingly to interrelated environmental threats including climate change, water scarcity or excess, biodiversity decline, emerging pests and pathogens, air pollution and changes in rates of nutrient deposition, as well as economic, cultural and societal drivers from the development of the built environment for a growing population (e.g. housing) and the demand of the materials industry (e.g. timber). As a result, treescape structure and function may undergo changes of uncertain character, rapidity, and magnitude, with significant impacts on ecosystem service delivery. The benefits treescapes provide and what we want them to provide must remain in synch; strategies to keep ecosystem services and societal requirements in lock-step are key to this programme. At the same time as treescapes develop in size and diversity, they will invariably impact on the wider environment and landscape that we - as individuals and a society – wish to create and live in. Therefore, a much-improved quantitative and qualitative understanding of how and why different treescapes are derived and used, the benefits they provide and their response to 21st Century pressures is urgently required.

An interdisciplinary approach across the environmental, economic and social sciences, as well as the arts and humanities, is required to improve our understanding of the complex interplay between environmental conditions and constraints on the treescape with our social and cultural requirements, and failure to recognise them can result in highly adverse outcomes. Advances in new and emerging technologies, application of novel methodologies and use of environmental, socio-economic data and historical records, and incorporation of community perception and collective memories, have the potential to reveal many previously hidden properties and trends and create a richer understanding of different treescapes.

Improved understanding of this complex interplay will help decision-makers determine the location and type of treescapes required in the future in order to grow the green economy, reduce inequalities and lead to healthier, more resilient, and culturally rich environments for future generations.

At present, the funders anticipate the UKRI programme “Future of UK Treescapes” will be delivered through a number of inter-related calls including an initial call for large
interdisciplinary research consortia, a later second call for projects that address gaps identified in the programme portfolio, and a final call for knowledge exchange projects as the programme enters its final two years.

3. Scope

3.1 Programme objectives

The overarching objective of the “Future of UK Treescapes” programme is to improve significantly the environmental, socio-economic and cultural understanding of the functions and services provided by UK treescapes, in order to inform decision-making on the expansion of future treescapes for the benefits of the environment and society.

Three themes have been identified to address the overarching objective:

Theme 1: Form, function and values of UK Treescapes

This theme seeks to better understand how we characterise a fully functioning treescapes and the functions provided by UK treescapes. It will explore the ways they have been shaped by different management practices, environmental conditions, cultural and socio-economic drivers and values through time, and how this is expected to change with the new social, cultural and environmental demands placed on treescapes. Characterisation will require data at scale and from diverse sources, from the molecular, organismal and biome through to socio-economic datasets, cultural and historical evidence, and aesthetic and ethical values.

Theme 2: Opportunities, barriers and pathways for expansion of UK Treescapes

Understanding the potential contributions and limitations of expanding UK treescapes to delivering local requirements as well as national and international policy goals. There is a need to understand the environmental, social, economic benefits and limitations of different strategies of treescapes expansion and configuration. Identification of realistic pathways to achieve afforestation targets taking into account the diverse benefits and disbenefits of treescapes and balancing competing demands and priorities of stakeholders. Pathways should lead to a sustainable expansion of the treescapes, and there is a need to understand how this pathway feeds into policy making and its contributions to economy, climate mitigation, and changing societal and cultural values in the face of pressures arising from the expansion.

Theme 3: Resilience of UK Treescapes to global change

The UK treescapes needs to be placed in a global context – both policy and environmental. The programme seeks to identify these drivers of change (for example changes in climate and atmospheric pollution, increased pest and pathogen outbreaks, and human population change) that pose significant risks to the resilience of current and future UK treescapes over decadal and longer timescales, and identifying strategies and measures (such as low risk pathways) that could mitigate their impact and enhance treescapes resilience.

A holistic, whole-systems approach will be required to capture interactions across spatial and temporal scales and trophic levels, alongside socio-economic and cultural responses and management interventions. The programme seeks to exploit innovative sensing,
analytical, and genetic technologies, arts and humanities methodologies, as well as the creation and linking of environmental, social and economic data sets that will transform understanding of treescape form, function, and feedbacks.

The programme would advance and test new visions of, measurements of, and approaches to landscape management and use. It would respond to current climate and rural economy policy priorities and future environmental and economic necesseties, and recognise the new opportunities afforded through growing investments in green markets and the bioeconomy.

The programme will also provide stakeholders with a coherent and impactful research base for understanding the present services of, and future pathways for, UK treescapes in response to environmental, socio-economic, and cultural drivers. A key outcome from the programme will be tools and capacity to characterise the impact of varying treescape form and location upon the ecosystem services and evidence to support benefits that might be delivered by ‘environmental net gain’ policies.

3.2 The Programme ambassador role and requirements

The purpose of this role is to provide added value to the portfolio of projects that will be supported in the Future of UK Treescapes programme. This is expected to be largely an external facing role in which the ambassador engages externally on behalf of the programme and projects. A major challenge to the successful expansion of the UK treescapes is understanding by the public, policy makers, land users and managers, of the capabilities and constraints of developing a UK treescape. The ambassador must engage with these diverse actors and stakeholders and articulate the messages and knowledge arising from this programme.

Applications are open to researchers from all disciplines represented by NERC, AHRC and ESRC remits. Successful applicant must demonstrate the ability to engage diverse research and stakeholder communities.

The ambassador role will be to:

- ensure the programme has a strong and visible profile across the relevant communities including researchers, the public, policy makers, land users and managers, and NGOs;
- support the interdisciplinary nature of this programme, linking up communities across the environmental and social sciences and arts and humanities;
- promote two-way communication and engagement and exchange of research needs and outputs between the projects and those who use, manage or otherwise have an interest in the relevant treescapes;
- provide research coordination and integration across the portfolio of research, developing synergies through promoting tools, data, site or knowledge sharing, where possible;
- maintain programme awareness of, and linkage to, relevant local, regional, national and international efforts and initiatives;
- provide advice and recommendations to the Programme Executive Board regarding the scope of calls, as required;
• coordinate programme monitoring and provide inputs for programme evaluation activities;
• provide reports and progress updates to Programme Executive Board, as required;
• lead on the organisation of programme events including annual programme conference or programme participation in other conferences, workshops etc.
• advise the Programme Executive Board on relevant policy changes that may affect Treescapes and the research projects throughout the lifetime of the programme

Key stakeholders for the outputs of this programme include (but are not limited to) Defra and associated bodies, the Devolved Administrations, local governments/authorities. The ambassador will be expected to engage with other relevant research initiatives and programmes, especially where synergies can be developed by working together, as well as other relevant national and international policy initiatives. Consideration about how to engage new and emerging research throughout the lifetime of the programme should also be made.

In the first six months the key priorities for the ambassador will be to:

• refine the priorities for the subsequent calls for funding to achieve the objectives of the programme.
• seek early engagement from key stakeholders and wider interested parties in the programme

4. Programme requirements

4.1 Programme funding

A grant of up to £500k (80% FEC) is available for a period of 48 months. It is expected that the successful ambassador will spend a minimum of 0.2FTE (up to 0.5FTE) on the Programme.

The funding can be used for the following:

• Buying out teaching, if applicable
• Admin support
• Communication support
• Research Associates (RAs) e.g. to help with planning and delivery of workshops
• Travel and subsistence

No associated studentships can be requested under this call.

The funders will hold a separate budget to support a minimum of three programme-wide events including programme kick-off and finale. The ambassador will be expected to develop the meeting agendas and lead on the delivery of these events. There may also be opportunities for limited additional funding to support stakeholder engagement or coordination activities including additional meeting or workshops throughout the lifetime of the programme subject to the approval of the Programme Executive Board.
Applications are welcome from academics that job share, have a part time contract or those currently committed to other longer, large existing grants (centres, hubs, programme grants, CDT, etc.) which commitments enable the applicant to be able to fulfil the ambassador role.

The role of programme ambassador may be shared by two co-applicants: one should be listed as PI and one as Co-I and they should have distinct roles and demonstrate clear split of responsibility e.g. 1) Strategy, 2) Management, and clarify how they would effectively work together.

4.2 Implementation and delivery

The successful applicant should start no later than 1 September 2020.

4.3 Knowledge Exchange and Impact

Knowledge exchange (KE) is vital to ensure that publicly-funded research has wide benefits for society, and should be an integral part of any research.

While the projects funded through the programme will have included impact activities as part of their projects, there are significant benefits to be gained from sharing these and also having programme-wide knowledge exchange activities to engage users and maximise impact of the awards and of the programme as a whole. Stakeholder engagement is an essential element of the programme and as such activities that support programme-wide stakeholder engagement should be included in the Programme Coordination Plan. Programme-wide knowledge exchange activities will also enable a coherent presentation to users of all the evidence of the benefits of incorporating whole systems thinking.

4.4 Programme management

The Programme Executive Board (PEB) will provide the strategic direction for the programme and will be the ultimate decision-making authority. The PEB will be chaired by a representative of NERC, and will include representative(s) from other programme funders (AHRC and ESRC), and relevant users/stakeholders, as required.

The programme will have an independent Programme Advisory Board (PAB) that will provide strategic advice to the Programme ambassador and PEB to ensure the delivery of the programme objectives. The Programme ambassador will be expected to convene this and populate the membership in discussion with the PEB.

4.5 Reporting requirements

As with all NERC grant holders, there will be a requirement to report through the UKRI reporting system; this is required annually and continues for up to five years post grant end.

To ensure an efficient reporting process is in place for the programme, the ambassador should:

- maintain oversight of the programme research activities, to inform reporting to the PEB including progress reports at agreed intervals and as required;
- complete and submit biannual progress reports to the funders using the provided template;
• provide additional information as required by the funders in order to meet their organisational reporting requirements

5. Application process

5.1 How to apply

Closing Date: 4pm 21 May 2020

Full proposal must be submitted using the Research Councils’ Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Applicants should select:

• Proposal Type - ‘Standard Proposal’
• Scheme – ‘Directed’
• Call – ‘Treescapes Coordination 2020’.

The call will close on JeS at 4pm on 21 May 2020 and it will not be possible to submit to the call after this time. Applicants should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation’s Je-S submission route before this date. Any proposal that is incomplete, or does not meet NERC’s eligibility criteria or follow NERC’s submission rules (see NERC Grants Handbook), will be office rejected and will not be considered.

All attachments, with the exception of letters of support and services/facilities/equipment quotes, submitted through the Je-S system must be completed in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point (Arial or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size to Arial 11), with margins of at least 2cm. Please note that Arial narrow, Calibri and Times New Roman are not allowable font types and any proposal which has used either of these font types within their submission will be rejected. References and footnotes should also be at least 11 point font and should be in the same font type as the rest of the document. Headers and footers should not be used for references or information relating to the scientific case. Applicants referring to websites should note that referees may choose not to use them.

Applicants should ensure that their proposal conforms to all eligibility and submission rules, otherwise their proposal may be rejected without peer review. More details on NERC’s submission rules can be found in the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook and in the submission rules on the NERC website.

Proposals for this call should be submitted in standard grant format following the requirements outlined in Section F of the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook and attach the following documents:

1. **Case for Support** (up to 8 sides of A4), comprised of:
   a) Personal statement (up to 2 sides), covering:
      • Why the applicant wants the role and what they will bring to it;
      • Previous Track Record, particularly noting experience on coordinating large and interdisciplinary initiatives with strong communications and impact activities
   b) Description of the Programme Coordination Plan (up to 6 sides), including:
      • description of how engagement with key stakeholders will be implemented and how programme-wide knowledge exchange will be promoted;
      • description of how programme coordination and integration of the programme will be implemented, including planning of programme events;
      • indication of how broader communications for the programme will be implemented;
• proposed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of programme activities, particularly as related to outcomes and impacts;
• management plan – include details and justification of time commitment of the Programme ambassador (% FTE), and any support roles required. Also include an indication of other external organisation/individual resources that will be subcontracted or utilised, and confirmation of the organisation’s ability to host the activity for the duration specified;
• work plan for the activity including a Gantt chart and detailed work plan for the first year, and a broad forecast plan for subsequent years, including anticipated milestones and deliverables.

2. **Host organisation statement** (up to 2 sides A4 – using Letter of Support in JeS):
   Senior leader within your host organisation (e.g. Head of Department) must complete a statement in support of the application. The statement should be on organisation headed paper, dated, and should clearly state the position held by the author. The statement must include details of the following considerations:
   • Identification of the key characteristics and skills that the applicant has, which the institution feels highlights the applicant’s ability to succeed as programme ambassador;
   • The level of support that the host institution will be giving the applicant both as a standard career development package that is open to all staff and additional support;
   • Details for any support beyond career development (i.e. dedicated admin support, mentoring, etc.)

3. **Justification of resources** (up to 2 sides A4):
   A full justification of the resources requested within the proposal, which should explain how the resources requested (staff time, travel and subsistence costs, and accommodation) are appropriate for the proposal and represent value for money.

4. **CVs** (up to 2 sides A4 per CV) for all Principal and Co-Investigators and named research staff.

Please note the following are not required as part of the application:
   • Outline Data Management Plan
   • Project Partners – the role requires engagement with a broad range of stakeholders.

Applicants are reminded that on submission to council ALL non PDF documents are converted to PDF, the use of non-standard fonts may result in errors or font conversion, which could affect the overall length of the document.

Additionally where non-standard fonts are present, and even if the converted PDF document may look unaffected in the Je-S System, when it is imported into the Research Councils Grants System some information may be removed. We therefore recommend that where a document contains any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams etc), the document should be converted to PDF prior to attaching it to the proposal.

The expected start date for the grant funded under this Announcement of Opportunity is 1 September 2020.

5.2 **Eligibility**

Applicants should note that the successful Programme ambassador will not be eligible to bid for research grant funding from the programme. This is a standard
stipulation for all such posts. Its purpose is to counter any perceptions in the community that holders of such posts may have preferential access to funding. For the avoidance of doubt, the funders wish to make it clear that the restriction applies only to the named individual(s) and does not extend to members of their research department or organisation.

Normal individual eligibility applies and is in Section C of the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook. Research Organisation eligibility rules are in Section C of the handbook.

NERC research and fellowship grants for all schemes may be held at approved UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), approved Research Council Institutes (RCIs) and approved Independent Research Organisations (IROs). Full details of approved RCIs and IROs can be found on the UKRI website.

Applicants may only be involved in one proposal submitted to this call as either Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator.

6. Assessment

6.1. Assessment process

An initial sift of applications will be conducted by an independent panel comprised of academics, users, and funder representatives. The funders (NERC, AHRC and ESRC) reserve the right to reject any applications which are deemed out of remit or do not fit the assessment criteria.

Successful applicants at the sift stage will be invited to present their proposal to the panel in an interview. Applications will be assessed on the quality of the proposal submitted and performance at interview, which will include a presentation of their proposal to the panel, and a question and answer session following this.

6.2. Assessment criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

1. Quality and appropriateness of proposed approach for delivering the responsibilities of the role:
   a. Demonstrable understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme and appropriate plan to deliver the requirements

2. Track Record:
   a. Relevant research credentials and knowledge of the current interdisciplinary research landscape and emerging issues relevant to UK treescapes.
   b. Experience of leading, managing or co-ordinating a large research programme or projects.
   c. Knowledge and ability to quickly assimilate information of relevant research, inter/multi-disciplinary approaches and policy pertaining to the programme.

3. Impact
   a. Demonstrable understanding of the potential stakeholders and potential impact
   b. Experience of effectively engaging with a range of stakeholders.
   c. Realistic and appropriate plans for engagement with stakeholders and shaping of KE activities to maximise impact from the programme.
4. Communication
   a. Ability to communicate research aims and outputs to a variety of audiences (including government, industry, NGOs and general public)

5. Value for Money
   a. Appropriate allocation of funds and justification of resources
   b. Added value – involvement with other related initiatives where lessons could be learned or synergies made.

Feedback will be provided to both successful and unsuccessful applicants after the interview stage.

7. Timetable
   - Announcement published: 27 March 2020
   - Deadline for submission: 21 May 2020
   - Interview panel meets: week commencing 6 July 2020
   - Latest start date: 1 September 2020

8. Contact

For all enquiries, please contact the UK Treescapes programme team:
uktreescapes@nerc.ukri.org