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Major £15 million gift to the University of Birmingham enables creation of Forest Research Institute

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A new Institute for Forest Research (**BIFoR (/research/activity/bifor/index.aspx)**) will be established by the University of Birmingham to study the impact of climate and environmental change on woodlands, and the resilience of trees to pests and diseases, thanks to a transformational gift of £15 million.

The gift of £15 million, which has been donated by former academic and alumnus, Professor Jo Bradwell and his wife Barbara, is one of the largest gifts to a UK university, and will enable the University of Birmingham to establish a unique, world leading centre and to be bold and ambitious in its research intentions to understand how forests react to the combined threats of climate change and invasive pests and diseases.

In addition to on-campus laboratories, it is the intention that the Institute will comprise ground-breaking field facilities, enabling scientists to take measurements from deep within the soil to above the tree canopy. Autonomous sensors and instrumented trees will allow scientists to take measurements continuously and remotely, over timescales ranging from seconds to decades.

Forests are critical components of global carbon, nutrient and water cycles, influencing the thermal balance of the planet directly and indirectly, and are home to more than half of all known species. Forests deliver direct economic, environmental and social benefits, ranging from fuel and building materials, to the sense of well-being associated with a walk in the woods. More subtly, forests also deliver services that underpin the production of food, clean water, and the breakdown of waste products. As human populations have expanded, increasing pressures have been placed on forests, with the 20th century witnessing the steepest rise in rates of deforestation.

The dynamic response of forests to combinations of climate change and pests and diseases are only partially understood, because there have been too few experiments on established unmanaged (wild) forests of sufficient scientific depth and duration.

As Professor Jo Bradwell explained:

'The UK has the lowest woodland cover of any large, European country because of deforestation over the centuries. What little we have remaining is now under serious threat from climate change and imported tree diseases. The new forestry institute will increase our understanding of these challenges in order to help planners, owners and foresters maintain and improve the health of our woods.'

Professor Malcolm Press, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Birmingham, said:

'The University is ideally placed to integrate research and education in forests and forestry with its global strengths in related areas such as microbiology, ecology, climatology, and sustainability science. With our bold ambitions to build such a unique facility we intend to attract the best scientists who can work with us to make this centre the best in the world.'

Professor of Atmospheric Science, Rob MacKenzie, from the University of Birmingham's School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, said:

'We want to understand the myriad individual processes that control how a forest landscape will evolve under the pressures of a changing environment. Beyond that, we want to observe — and, where possible, manipulate — all the individual processes locked together. The new institute will allow just this reach: from the laboratory to the forest, from the biochemistry occurring in a second to the ecology occurring over a decade.'

Professor David Eastwood, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, said:

'We are hugely grateful for this inspirational donation. Philanthropic gifts like this have become vital for universities, increasing their ability and agility to tackle global challenges. This donation will enable us to fulfill our desire to be an international force in this emerging yet critical area of research and to create an Institute that will be unique in Europe and produce research results that will be crucial to many of the great societal issues facing us today.'

Nick Blinco, Director of Development, Alumni and Business Engagement, said:

'I would like to thank Jo and Barbara for their transformational donation. Their gift demonstrates the University's ability to work in partnership with leading UK and international philanthropists, helping them to realise their ambitions and to make an impact in the world. Their support, together with the many thousands of donors to the Circles of Influence campaign – the most successful university fundraising campaign in the Midlands – are helping us to have an impact locally, nationally, and internationally.'

Notes to Editors

Professor Jo Bradwell studied medicine at the University of Birmingham and graduated in 1968, subsequently becoming lecturer in the Department of Medicine then senior lecturer and professor in the Department of Immunology. He founded the Binding Site, a University spin-out company in 1983, which first developed diagnostic products for immune-deficiency and autoimmunity then a range of important novel cancer tests. The company has continued to grow and expand for 30 years and has won the Queens Award for Export Achievement twice, and the Queens Award for Enterprise

University of Birmingham
The Times and Sunday Times University of the Year 2013-14, the University of Birmingham is a vibrant, global community and an internationally-renowned institution, in the top 75 globally. With approximately 28,000 students and 6,000 members of staff, its work brings people from more than 150 countries to Birmingham.

This donation is part of the University of Birmingham's **Circles of Influence Campaign (/alumni/giving/index.aspx)** which has raised £130 million to date.

For further information
Kate Chapple, Press Office, University of Birmingham, tel +44(0)121 414 2772 or +44(0)7789 921164, email: **k.h.chapple@bham.ac.uk (mailto:k.h.chapple@bham.ac.uk)** or Jo Kite, Director of Communications and Marketing, University of Birmingham, tel +44(0)121 414 8470 or +44(0)7766 205630, email: **j.r.kite@bham.ac.uk (mailto:j.r.kite@bham.ac.uk)**

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