

Ministerial Foreword - Forestry in Scotland is a sector that we can be justly proud of.

## 1 - Introduction and Rationale for Providing Grant Support for Forestry

1. Do you agree that grant support for forestry should continue to be improved and developed as a discrete scheme within the overall package of land support?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Continuing to improve grant support for forestry should be done as a discrete scheme within the overall package of land support. At this scale it can ensure integration with all other land use sectors.

2. Are there any changes that would allow for better complementarity between the forestry and agriculture funding options?

Not sure

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Integration of farming and forestry is highly desirable if woodland planting aspirations are to be achieved. The biggest deterrents to woodland creation are the reduction in land value when converting agricultural land to woodland and access to grants which incentivize a change in land use. Woodland creation should be presented as an important farm diversification strategy.

As a Council, we submitted comments on the consultation for Proposals for a new Agriculture Bill and until a new support system for farmers in the UK has been agreed, benefits cannot be realised as there is no direction nor incentive.

## 2 - Forests Delivering for Scotland's Climate Change Plan

3. How can the support package for forestry evolve to help tackle the climate emergency, to achieve net zero, and to ensure that our woodlands and forests are resilient to the future climate?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

### Climate Change Impacts

Managing climate change risk means making significant changes to widely accepted and practiced forestry. Acceptance of natural colonisation of woodlands of non-native tree species may be a valid adaptation strategy and this information should be provided to support land managers. The support package should also help land managers create contingency plans for responding to increasing risks of catastrophic wind damage, fire, and pest or disease outbreaks.

### Peatland

There should be a strong presumption against further forestry expansion on functioning peatland, degraded peatland capable of being restored and other high carbon soils. Peatland habitats within forests should remain as open ground for protection. Grant funding should be awarded to restore peatland e.g. drain blocking or removal of unwanted natural regeneration in areas forming part of the open-ground component of woodlands.

### Carbon Sequestration

Whilst the carbon sequestration value of our woodlands is going to be essential to reaching net zero, we cannot solely focus on the carbon sequestration rate of specific species. The support package for forestry should continue to encourage planting a diverse mix of tree species (with a focus on native species), rather than focusing solely on planting trees with a high carbon sequestration rate like sitka spruce.

In calculating carbon capture, it is important to consider the carbon emissions associated with soil disturbance due to the planting process as this can be significant and move the carbon breakeven point for high carbon soil sites to >20 years.

There are currently uncertainties in estimates of soil carbon stock changes in early years following woodland establishment. There is also some uncertainty in estimates of carbon stocks in tree roots and branches. Source - "Quantifying the sustainable forestry carbon cycle Summary Report". It is important to review how to reduce forest carbon uncertainties and increase efficiency of carbon assessments.

Felling periods are important to consider with carbon sequestration potential. As mature trees sequester more carbon (up until a specific timepoint per species) allowing early felling and replanting with like for new trees will lead to a significant reduction in carbon sequestration by the site and incentivising keeping trees at times maximum sequestration should be encouraged.

As trees mature guidance and support is needed to encourage (a) the sustainable management of existing trees and woodlands so that they are more resilient to the long-term effects of climate change, continuing to act as a carbon sink and (b) consideration of joining woodlands together to create larger woodlands. This should also be reflected by local authorities in the review and development of their Forestry & Woodland Strategies, as required under

the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.

Forestry guidance should follow the adoption of NPF4, e.g. promoting the development of resilient nature networks through coordinating placements of woodland corridors.

4. Private investment through natural capital and carbon schemes can make a valuable contribution to climate change. Do you agree that the grant support mechanism should have more flexibility to maximise the opportunities to blend private and public finance to support woodland creation,

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

This could be achieved through the option to apply for a lower rate of grant, with applications favoured if private finance is secured.

Allowing blended finance may make it easier for existing landowners to secure private funding at a realistic level, without relying on it to make the project financially viable on its own.

It would be helpful to establish nationally an agreed approach or methodology for calculating natural capital and carbon credit schemes, which could be applied universally, not only for trees, forests, and woodlands, but also much wider to projects and proposals for all aspects of green and blue infrastructure. It would help provide greater clarity regarding requirements from the outset, level the playing field for all, and assist in the delivery of identified targets and desired outcomes on the ground, through a range of plans, policies and strategies, and via other mechanisms, like planning obligations. This should ultimately allow for better nature network connections to be made.

5. How could the current funding package be improved to stimulate woodland expansion and better management across a wide range of woodland types, including native and productive woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Planting densities and understory

The grant scheme should change restrictions around high planting densities and amount of understory species. Planting at high densities, with predominantly top canopy species does not lead to the establishment of a woodland that looks or functions like a natural woodland habitat. They often do not have a diverse age structure or understory, do not develop a diverse ground layer with a variety of flowering herbs and do not support a wide diversity of woodland animals.

Management is required to bring light to the woodland floor to allow high quality habitat to develop, while it also promotes natural regeneration and evolutionary adaptation to the changing climate. There is a growing awareness that conifer plantations need to be more sustainable and resilient due to the increasing threat of climate change and the negative consequences this has on forests and biodiversity. Currently alternative methods of managing conifer plantations are being adopted across the UK. This includes "irregular forestry" which creates diverse structured woodland, with patchy openings on a permanent canopy by selective tree felling. A varied canopy provides habitat for species with opposing needs.

Natural Regeneration

There is currently a lower grant rate for natural regeneration. We should be promoting this option the most, with greater funding for reducing deer and other herbivores numbers effectively without using fencing.

Riparian Woodland

The funding package should have a specific focus on riparian woodland creation, which we see Scottish Forestry are currently developing. We need riparian woodland at a catchment scale. This will have additional benefits including providing shade to reduce thermal stress for Atlantic salmon and other river organisms, reducing flood risk, and enhancing watercourse biodiversity.

Extra Grant Aid

In Perth and Kinross, 12.5% extra grant is available to incentivise woodland creation in the Preferred and Potential areas of the P&K Forest and Woodland Strategy, but only for the following woodland creation options: Conifer (i.e. Sitka); Diverse Conifer (productive conifers but not Sitka); and Broadleaves (productive broadleaves).

This differs from the Target Areas for both the National Parks and the Highland Council area. In the Cairngorms NP (and therefore in the areas of P&K inside the Park), the Preferred and Potential areas in our Forest Strategy qualify for a 12.5% uplift for FGS woodland creation grants for Native Scots Pine; Native Broadleaves; Native Upland Birch; Native Low Density Broadleaves; and Diverse Conifer (on the presumption the main conifer would be commercial Scots pine). This option would be beneficial across P&K so, we do not incentivise planting non-native majority Sitka spruce woodlands.

6. Do you agree that it should be a requirement of grant support that woodlands are managed to ensure that they become more resilient to the impacts of climate change and pests and disease?

Yes

How can the grant scheme support this?:

Yes, to create resilient long-term assets from our woodlands, we need a wide range of species and resilient genetic make-up within those species. The grants guidance should provide advice on how to reduce the impacts of tree pests and diseases and build the resilience of Scotland's trees, woodlands and forests.

Guidance should be given to land managers where there is new research/information on the following:

- when to introduce species appropriate to the woodland to diversify species composition, enhance its resilience to climate change and pest and disease outbreaks (including via planting non-native trees and natural regeneration).
- how diversification of woods can increase the resilience of woodland ecosystem functions and the wider woodland biodiversity, such as birds, insects, mammals and plants.
- diversity in tree species microbes and resistance to pathogens.

### 3 - Integrating Woodlands on Farms and Crofts

7. Which of the following measures would help reduce the barriers for crofters and farmers wanting to include woodland as part of their farming business? Please select all that apply.

Better integration of support for woodland creation with farm support mechanisms, Clearer guidance on grant options, Flexibility within options, Intervention level, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

Many farmers are reluctant to plant trees on what is perceived as 'good farmland'. However, there are many examples of good practice woodland on farmland - there should be a focus on these, illustrating their different approaches to bringing woodland on farmland to engage other farmers in woodland creation.

More information should be provided on how agroforestry can increase ecological connectivity and biodiversity which can have a positive impact on ecosystem functions essential for the provision of services beneficial to farming including fertile soil, water supply and pollination.

8. Establishing small woodlands can have higher costs. What specific mechanisms would better support small scale woodlands and woodland ownership?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The scheme should allow landowners to consider planting new small woods. Owners of small woodlands focus less on timber and more on shelter, than owners of large woodlands.

Can the new rates for native woodland planting in the crofting counties be used for all small woodlands?

We are pleased to see there is currently funding for a specialist adviser to help with woodland creation for farmers and crofters. Promoting this widely through NFUS, FAS, and other networks will help to support more interest in small scale woodland creation.

### 4 - Forests Delivering for People and Communities

9. How can forestry grants better support an increase in easily accessible, sustainably managed woodlands in urban and peri-urban areas?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Is it possible for the Forest Grant Scheme to provide greater incentives for community groups or landowners, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas, to bring forward plans for the creation of new woodlands, expansion and enhancement of existing woodlands, and management of neglected sites, where such schemes can demonstrate how they will contribute to tackling the dual climate and nature crises, as well as improving the quality of life for residents in the surrounding environs? In line with NPF4, Forestry and Woodland Strategies, and Local Development Plans could provide the evidence base for the identification of locations where opportunities exist to create multiple benefits for health, wellbeing, biodiversity, and increasing the resilience of communities to the impacts of climate change.

10. How can grant support for forestry better enable rural communities to realise greater benefits from woodland to support community wealth building?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

From the beginning of a woodland proposal, attempts should be made to engage the local community in working out the objectives for a woodland to maximise the benefits that the woodland can deliver to the community e.g. meet the needs of wildlife while supporting livelihoods and providing many other ecosystem services.

11. How can the forest regulatory and grant processes evolve to provide greater opportunities for communities to be involved in the development of forestry proposals?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The Scottish Forestry Public Register should be promoted more widely, to allow the public to view and comment on Felling Permission and Forestry Grant Scheme Applications.

Greater transparency will allow rural communities to have input into proposals, allowing them to gain more benefits from woodland. Rural communities will be particularly interested in creating welcoming forests to walk/cycle/ and enjoy the environment. They may wish to comment on access issues e.g. deer fencing, stiles, and gates. There may also be concern over the visual impact of forestry operations on the landscape. Involving rural communities from the beginning of the consultation process will allow input, supporting community wealth building. Additionally, forestry proposals should have more

community consultation drop in events so that community councils, local access groups, etc can actively receive insight to projects and share their thoughts on them in person.

12. How can the forestry regulatory and grant processes evolve to ensure that there is greater transparency about proposals and the decisions that have been made on them?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The Scottish Forestry Public Register should be promoted more widely, to allow the public to view and comment on Felling Permission and Forestry Grant Scheme Applications. As above, forestry proposals should have more community consultation drop in events so that community councils, local access groups, etc can learn about proposals and the decisions made on them.

13. Forestry grants have been used to stimulate rural forestry businesses by providing support with capital costs. Do you agree that this has been an effective measure to stimulate rural business?

Not Answered

a. How could this approach be used to support further forestry businesses?:

b. How could this approach be used to support further skills development?:

14. How could the FGS processes and rules be developed to encourage more companies and organisations to provide training positions within the forestry sector?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

## 5 - Forests Delivering for Biodiversity and the Environment

15. The primary purpose of FGS is to encourage forestry expansion and sustainable forest management, of which a key benefit is the realisation of environmental benefits. How can future grant support better help to address biodiversity loss in Scotland including the regeneration and expansion of native woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Major barriers to forestry expansion include grazing on vegetation, limiting natural regeneration (more on this in Q16), and the loss of habitat to competing land-use demands. There is the need to balance woodland creation with other land uses and promote its benefits.

More work should be taken forward by partners such as Farm Advisory Service (FAS) along with SF to increase interest in agroforestry amongst farmers and crofters as a viable land management practice for delivering both environmental and business benefits. E.g., silvopasture agroforestry can enhance animal welfare as shade and shelter reduces temperature extremes, reducing animal stress.

Sheep farming, grouse moorland management, land for deer stalking, and other forms of land management prevent the natural regeneration of native woodland in Scotland. We are aware there is existing financial support for small-scale woodland creation e.g. within sheep grazing pasture. However, often there needs to be more than financial incentive to encourage a cultural shift to allow more woodland on these land areas.

Specifically for moorland, guidance and support should be available to plant forests on cleugh sides. Cleugh woodlands are areas of steep-sided woodland found on valley sides on the edge of open moorland. Planting here is unlikely to have the negative impacts associated with carbon loss, soil disruption, and impacting moorland ecology. Along with woodland creation will be the need for necessary funding to control grazing pressure.

16. Herbivore browsing and damage can have a significant impact on biodiversity loss and restrict regeneration. How could forestry grant support mechanisms evolve to ensure effective management of deer populations at:

Landscape scale?:

If we are serious about landscape scale ecological restoration in Scotland, then the priority is to cut down grazing pressures in and around our woodland, without requiring fencing.

Finance for deer culling, where it is the most effective means of achieving the desired habitat outcomes, should be available. At a landscape scale this includes a high level of effort to address the problem, working with neighbouring landowners. From an economical/employment point of view, it is also better to employ more deer stalkers.

Erecting fences to keep deer out of woodland pushes deer to other unfenced areas of land. Deer fences also have a visual impact on the landscape and can block public access. They can also lead to bird deaths from collisions, particularly black grouse and capercaillie. They are also very expensive. Fencing can create an artificial tree line and therefore the natural shrub habitat occurring between forest edges and hillside cannot exist. This therefore reduces this habitat for a great deal of species. We recommend less funding for deer and stock fencing, and more for deer culling.

Deer fencing where new woodland establishment needs protection to allow it to establish may be supported at the discretion of SF. Support should usually only be for enclosures where culling is unfeasible.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Deer fencing of small enclosures should be a lower priority in the absence of justifiable deer management

If you wish to make any other relevant comments, please do so in the text box below.

Please add your comments here.:

We would like to see Scottish Forestry encourage recycling/ re-use of plastic tree protection.

## About you

What is your name?

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What is your email address?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:  
Perth and Kinross Council

Scottish Forestry would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response with name

We may share your response internally with other Scottish Forestry policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Forestry to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

I consent