

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
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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?

Not sure

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There should be greater integration between forest schemes and agricultural schemes ie all Scottish Government funded land schemes. Seamless, eg riparian woodland or more open woodland that does not destroy the existing sward on permanent pasture with already high levels of soil carbon that could be grazed as tree growth permits, bringing greater value for biodiversity and farm enterprise and business - in contrast to have whole farms converted to purely commercial forestry with an associated loss of the social and historical community aspects of an area. If the grant support for forestry has to be improved and developed it should be looking at including practical options with an equal balance between farming and farm woodland/forestry interests.

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

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

See above. We need to see much greater integrated schemes for land managers so that farmers can take more control of the forestry and woodland management potential on their land. As noted later, the application process for woodlands up to 2ha in size should be made much simpler.

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.:

1. No planting on peatland and reduce the eligible minimum peat depth for new planting from 50cm to 10cm
2. Anyone who plants conifer species or native broadleaves and they seed onto peatland habitat must be liable for payment of seedling removal as the self seeding will dry and cause erosion and loss of carbon from the peatland habitat. This should be a condition of grant funding . Or require much wider buffers between peatland habitats and woodland creation sites. Similarly, need to examine in more detail tree planting on areas where there is a mosaic of mineral and deeper peat soils.
3. We must undertake to support a much higher level of native woodland planting to create diverse woodlands which in some situations can also be managed for timber eg birch sawlogs. There has been a focus on recent years on the creation of very large scale commercial forest areas, and while recognising the need for a home grown timber resource , much of the planting has a high %cover of Sitka spruce. This creates a much higher risk of disease and pest issues related to a monoculture . The % of broadleaves and other diverse conifer species for large scale woodland creation should be increased.
4. Tree shelters including vole guards of any plastic manufacture need to be removed and recycled before a final grant is paid. Alternatives should be encouraged where tree guards are necessary.
5. Think out the box and use natural regeneration as a tool to create new woodland areas which will be appropriate to site and lead to more natural woodland cover

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 you answer in the text box.:

The Woodland Carbon Code can currently provide additional income potential to woodland creation projects where they are eligible for the Code. This is a certified process and should be the only route in the UK for the involvement of private investment in woodland creation through a carbon scheme. However, riparian woodland creation for example is a higher cost activity but not necessarily achieving large net planting areas or therefore tCO₂e units so support must be more targeted for this type of planting . Carbon schemes focus on C sequestration as a means of removing CO₂ from the atmosphere but riparian woodland in particular deliver multiple benefits and, in the context of the climate emergency, offer great potential to help regulate river water temperatures and protect rivers from increases in water temperatures that are threatening the survival of salmon and other species. This should not be forgotten in the overall aim of increasing woodland cover.

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.:

Greater support for capital costs for smaller scale woodlands. Create a simpler application process for woodlands up to 2ha in size. Use the South of Scotland Tree Planting Grant which grant funds capital costs up to areas under 0.25ha. This scheme started as the Scottish Borders Tree Planting Grant and has resulted in many small scale but diverse woodland habitats over the years.

Improve management grants for basic good forestry practice and make it eligible country wide so that small woodlands on farms can be appropriately managed at a scale to fit with the management required. Small woodlands can also be productive, it is not the reserve of commercial forestry. In addition, this could help maintain the diversity of woodland habitats and the associated plant, insect and bird species in existing woodlands. In addition, expansion of native, or old mixed woodland will have the fungal mycelium associations present which help the new trees flourish. Good management of our existing woodlands can retain C in the soils and sequester more C at the same time.

Encourage and support continuous cover forestry (CCF) to a greater degree. This was the aim of the national forestry programme some years ago, with restructuring woodlands for age class and species but overall the move seems to be to be back to clearfell regimes due to the demand for biomass. CCF is carried out by some larger estates and does have greater benefits for woodland habitats and associated species.

Support the use of willow setts cut locally for new woodland creation in the same way purchased planting stock is grant funded.

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?:

Insist on diverse species planting, even for beating up. This is an absolute essential. CCF will mean a range of ages and species within a woodland which will help should a new pest affect a particular species or age group.

It is concerning that most current woodland creation is 70% Sitka spruce (SS) and should a pest come to the UK that affects SS the forestry industry will be at great risk. Approval for a woodland creation grant should be based on a maximum of 50-60% of a single species, unless where a particular native woodland NVC habitat is appropriate. This would mean raising the bar on diversity for the approval of large scale conifer based new planting

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, Knowing where to get reliable advice, Clearer guidance on grant options, Flexibility within options, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

Unsure what intervention level means at present ?

There is a system in place already to help with the cashflow issues with planting work for farm woodlands, continue this.

Create a simpler application process for woodland creation up to 2ha.

Many foresters and forest companies have a focus on large scale forestry management. This does not always translate to farm woodland creation as the integration with the farm's livestock or cropping enterprises is extremely important. More targeted woodland guidance for farms and crofters would be helpful. Provide funding assistance to permit up front on farm advice to identify woodland creation potential areas and the benefits to the ecology of the whole farm.

Support small woodland management machinery funding for on farm contractors as larger scale forestry machinery is not always suitable for farm woods

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.:

As all comments above. Easier application process - for small scale woodland creation, good advice availability and right tree right place. Also support individual in field and hedgerow trees through a simpler application process as some producers may be happy to plant trees this way than fencing off specific areas. The new 'cactus' guards are a cost effective and robust means of establishing individual trees.

Riparian woodlands, often small in area but costly to fence. Don't assess these and score for cost effectiveness along with the rest of the woodland applications. As noted above, these woodlands have a high public benefit and biodiversity scoring. Look to remove the 15m minimum width as currently stands for riparian woodland creation for native broadleaved woodland planting - permit funding for hand cut local willow setts and for natural

regeneration. Funding could be managed either through FGS or agri-environment and retain the BPS income for the area.

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.:

Manage the existing public spaces including parks to have much more diverse habitats within them. Tree planting could be accommodated within created meadow areas, permitting open glades for people to sit or children to play . Doesn't have to be either just mown grass or densely planted trees as is the usual form of urban tree planting. The former has high associated maintenance costs and the latter means nobody can walk through the woodland areas. If landowners near a settlement wish to create a woodland suitable for public access, they should be fully supported in the increased costs of doing this and the planting plan should not have to adhere to usual planting grant rules

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.:

Rural communities already have access to woodlands through the existing Access Code. Improve management options for existing woodland areas or creation of new woodlands near to settlements. It may cost less in terms of public finance for the same result if the land manager is supported directly

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 consultation process for new grant applications is already open to all to make comment.

But where non local investor groups are purchasing land and often whole farms, to plant with government grant funding, often community opinions are swept aside and in some areas there is now a real loss of the social networks that used to exist within these remoter areas. It could be called modern clearances with the loss of the history, knowledge and land management and husbandry, to forestry. Could an initiative be set up whereby large scale forestry developments are required to create a set of forest small holdings where people could still live and work on the land and help retain some open grassland and other habitats and opportunities for small businesses to develop and help keep a local community alive.

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.:

Make the planning documents for new schemes public including consultations

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 sure

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

Can we see the results and actual data from the previous grant funding please.

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

See above

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.:

There does already seem to be an increase in trainee positions within the larger forest companies and potential for a person to start at a basic level and move up through to management.

One of the issues in this process is that the trainee does not necessarily get a full education in the broader principles of woodland management ie soils, woodland ecology, associated botany and wildlife. Or an ability to assess the habitats where woodland is being proposed. A college course providing this background would be very beneficial - not just for trainees in forest companies and organisations, but also for farmers and other interested parties.

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.:

1. No downhill grips for any new planting, contour planting only.
2. No downhill mounding, contour mounding only.
3. More emphasis on native and riparian woodlands
4. More emphasis on a site habitat assessment as part of the grant application process including soils, peat depths and grassland habitats and evidence presented for this. Some areas being planted may not require an EIA, but may include unimproved species diverse swards which once planted with conifers in particular, lose that plant diversity and the associated insect and bird species once the canopy closes , and a loss of soil carbon in addition, particularly where ploughing or mounding for ground preparation occurs. The loss of good acid grassland to forestry is rapidly increasing at present.

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?:

Keep culling deer and good monitoring is essential

Don't fund any planting schemes that will not reduce deer numbers to below 3-5 per sq km. This would save huge amounts on deer fencing as part of grants, which is not sustainable and not good for the environment or biodiversity.

Reducing deer numbers could help greatly with natural regeneration as a sustainable means of expanding woodland cover

Sheep and cattle can play a role in biodiversity through their grazing patterns and dung deposits for insects. Low stocking on hills in particular, in conjunction with low deer numbers, can result in the regeneration of pioneer species and open woodland without destroying the swards, resulting in an even higher benefit for biodiversity than planted schemes where stock are excluded.

Small scale mixed land use?:

This is absolutely essential. A smaller holding can have a greater range of habitats on it compared with a large holding and also support small businesses and professional craft workers

Try more of the forest farm approach on Scottish Forestry Land or where landowners wish to set up such enterprises

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

Please add your comments here.:

Riparian woodlands require more attention and funding opportunities as the higher associated costs often means they are not economic to carry out, but have a huge benefit for water quality, wildlife and in the landscape

The activity of whole farm purchase and planting needs to be looked at as this has huge implications for the remaining local population and landscape diversity, particularly for areas such as the Scottish Borders where this is increasingly common . This will certainly lead to a loss in biodiversity and landscape value and the potential for any remaining public transport support and schools will go into decline.

Provide some funding for the cutting of willow whips from on or near the planting area - low cost and good source of local material. No protection needed. Some funding support will encourage this

Sheep and woodland. Low density planting with sheep grazing permitted is a winner as a habitat and for a farm business. The current sheep and tree scheme has too much focus on the tree element and spacing is too close. Move to a full silvo pastoral system.

Landowners and managers must be made aware that if they are thinking of woodland creation and being involved in the Woodland Carbon Code, then they do not have to sell all woodland C units and can retain them for their own use, or can sell in phases. They then cannot make a further claim on the same area of land for carbon.

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Organisation

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