

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.:

Local authorities (LAs) secure funding for new planting, managing woodlands and improving and maintaining public access within them from a variety of sources. These include their own internal budgets (Revenue and Capital), from Scottish Government via block grants for Climate Change Funding and the Nature Recovery Fund (NRF) and for specific schemes via the Scottish Forestry Grant scheme and from NatureScot.

Many LA staff and managers better understand the simpler forms of block grants via likes of the NRF and find the rules and administration of SFGS, including IACS registration overly bureaucratic.

It is suggested that there may be better mechanisms for supporting LA woodland and forestry creation and management the development of which STOG would like to assist.

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.:

Some Scottish Local Authorities have agricultural holdings but most of the land they own is not agricultural. Most agricultural land areas tend to be leased to farmers on either long leases or short-term grazing lets. Some sites may be grazed for amenity or biodiversity purposes and the areas managed in this way is likely to increase possibly including woodland areas to assist regeneration.

Larger sites and collections of sites within a neighbourhood are usually a combination of woodland, other semi-natural habitats or very often amenity grassland with trees. Ideally funding mechanisms would encourage the preparation and implementation of long-term management plans for the whole site. This would include the management of woods, other habitats, public access and facilities.

LAs tend to own a large amount of land associated with the roads network. Many of these roadsides would benefit from additional hedge and individual tree planting or replacement planting. This is especially the case in areas where large number of trees are being lost to Ash Dieback Disease or where trees (often beech), planted as part of improvements in late 1700s – early 1800s, are now senescing at an increasing rate. These linear feature are important for their ability to fill missing links in green networks, are important landscape features and also play their part in CO2 sequestration.

## 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.:

Consideration could be given to funding LAs directly.

LAs, as all public bodies, require to procure services via Public Contract Scotland and their own standing orders to ensure proper procurement and accounting protocols are followed and so grant funding based on developed plans and actual contract and staff costs would still have the necessary or more scrutiny than the current rate-based grant system. Costs for LA projects are often more expensive due to their locations and the need for more consultation.

However, they would need to be supported by Scottish Forestry, as many LAs do not have staff with training and experience in woodland creation / management or this work may be undertaken by other teams who do not have this background.

When it works well, this is considered to be a valuable aspect of the work Scottish Forestry currently undertakes itself or by funding Forest Research to do so eg recent work on the various aspects of woodland resilience and disseminating this to those out with the state forest sector as per recent ICF North Scotland seminar. STOG would be pleased to assist in extension of research and technical information to LA officers.

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.:

To our knowledge, this method of funding has not yet been assessed by most councils. At present most LAs are quite rightly concentrating on reducing their CO2 emissions. Many are aware that at they will need to offset residual CO2 emitted from providing their many services.

There may be opportunities to develop local schemes to enable the councils to offset their own excess CO2 in the first instance. As far as we are aware robust mechanisms for this have not yet been developed specifically for LAs in Scotland but there is scope particularly to link local businesses with new local woods or other tree planting schemes such as new hedgerows and urban trees.

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.:

The current funding package is reasonably generous for planting new areas across the Central Belt. Additional funding is required to enable the planting of smaller and more complex woods, including access infra-structure, as is usually required for those new woods developed by LAs.

The grant rates for WIAT projects are well-below the current market rates in and around urban centres.

There is no funding towards project management costs, including communication with and engagement and education of the public.

At present it is felt that it is easier to use Climate Change funding than go through the SFGS process. There concern from some Tree & Woodland officers in Scotland and other LAs throughout the UK that tree and woodland planting may be done without adequate thought regarding the long-term use and management of the woods and trees.

Most LAs are managing their woods for multiple objectives and to assist this better support and mechanisms for funding Continuous Cover Forestry and more adaptive woodland management would be helpful.

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?:

More adaptive forest management systems, which tend to be more resilient, are difficult to accommodate within the current grant and felling permission application systems.

To inform improvement in the grant and felling application forms a detailed discussion with the Continuous Cover Forestry Group and those who have long-term experience of using these systems would be beneficial. (Most often the projects which have worked on the ground are not textbook shelterwood / selection felling silvicultural systems but adapt to local conditions, tree species and growth).

There might be some benefit of having some "open book" projects which looked at the additional management and supervision costs of managing the public during the more frequent interventions required for CCF. In areas of high public use this can be a disincentive to using CCF (eg Beecraigs, Glentress) but it is in these areas which the landscape benefit is greatest in addition to the hoped for future resilience.

### 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.

Are there others not listed above?:

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.:

Small woodlands can be of key importance in creating green networks. In these circumstances, additional top up grants, especially to cover fencing costs would be required.

Much smaller scale planting areas (<0.25ha, hedges and individual trees) perhaps could be better delivered through local schemes, as was previously done through Durham County Council's very successful Tree Cover Scheme and as being currently administered by a number of LAs, Regional Forest Projects in England.

### 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.:

For LAs the SFGS is very different in format to grants from other funders, such as NatureScot / LandTrust / Paths4all with which officers and managers tend to be more familiar. A simpler system based on a project plan and actual costs, including maintenance, would be easier.

The current WIAT grant rates are well below actual costs, especially for sites with difficult access and logistics, which is very often the case.

Often standard rural forest specifications are not adequate or appropriate for the more urban locations.

Some woodland / forest areas in particular Country Parks and other destination sites lie beyond the 2km WIAT zone but are close urban areas and often used by far greater numbers of the urban populace than many within the 2km. A mechanism to identify which sites deliver the most benefit needs to be developed and funding allocated accordingly. STOG members would be happy to join others, working in this aspect of woodland management, to develop a suitable programme.

There are various external trusts supporting LAs, funded by Scottish Forestry and others and these may be good at individual project delivery but tend to be expensive for the LAs. However, the projects undertaken are often seen as "one-off" interventions without adequate consideration to the long-term

maintenance and management of the woods and access facilities or the staff resources required.

STOG members currently are working to encourage their employing authorities to undertake more pro-active woodland management and improve public access to their woods, for the well-known health and other benefits they provide. An important step in trying to secure internal and external funding is to have well-thought out strategy or action plan based on local requirements. As mentioned above, a grant towards taking this first step would be helpful. Community woodland grants used to be available to help fund education, engagement and communication associated with WIAT projects. This aspect of working in urban and peri-urban areas is often very onerous and some funding towards this would enable it to be done better and more extensively. There is also an opportunity to educate the more urban populace about the benefits of woods and their products in the fight against 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.:

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.:

For woods which are well-used by the public it is important to ensure that the consultees include those using the site. This is very often a longer and more complex process of discussions and publicity, than a one-off presentation to a Community Council. It requires staff, both SF and those implementing the project, to be trained in public engagement processes.

This was included in the training course covering various aspects of urban forestry management piloted by Scottish Forestry and others over a decade ago. [Redacted]

There used to be Community Involvement grants run in tandem with WIAT projects. These now seem to be purely for Community Groups to undertake work. In the case of woods managed by LAs there is a need for education and informal awareness raising, particularly in the case of Country and Urban Parks which are visited by very large numbers of a mainly urban populace.

This involves increasing understanding of woodland management on our own sites but as importantly can help people to understand about forestry and woodland management across Scotland eg we have found that many people have no understanding that Carbon remains locked within timber once a tree is felled for many decades depending on what it is used for.

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.:

Few of the general public are aware of the Public Register.

Community councils are often the means of consultation with local communities. Some are better than others at extending the invitation to view proposals to their wider community. Posters on local notice boards or on site may at least alert a larger number of people.

We have noted that some new private projects have had attractive information boards erected while work is being carried out. Something similar could be put up at the proposals stage depending on scale and sensitivity with this being an addition to the planning grant for more sensitive sites.

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?:

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

Encourage day / block release options for forestry/arboriculture apprenticeships within Local Authorities with good link between training and work experience so that each reinforces the other. LAs and Scottish Government organisations might be one way of providing supported starting off points in the industry. In the past many people had their apprenticeships with such organisations and then went on to set up their own businesses. While this may not be of direct long-term benefit to the organisation, government or wider industry support may be required.

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.:

In the past it has been mooted that the industry does more self-regulation, as per other professions, with the requirement of those undertaking the work be appropriately qualified. LAs follow this for some professions but tend not to do so for land-based ones. This is a more recent practice probably due to funding and staff shortages. If there were national regulation as per social work, teaching, engineering etc then this would bring about change.

## 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.:

Woodland biodiversity is not just about which species a woodland contains but structural diversity whether native or non-native including extended rotation lengths may be as important. Consideration should be given to supporting woodland management which increases structural diversity but more advice from the likes of Forest Research and the CCFG would be required.

Non-woodland biodiversity is also important - EIAs are required for larger sites and particularly sensitive ones. Introducing the requirement for a light touch EIA to be carried out on all new planting schemes would pick up small areas of diverse habitat or new habitat creation, such as small flushes and ponds. These combined across numerous sites could result in a significant retention / creation of other habitats. Grant aid towards retaining and managing other special habitats within the FGS would be helpful.

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?:

Collaboration between different landowners required.

Small scale mixed land use?:

The current requirements for applying for deer management are not cost effective unless dealing with large areas. Some assistance for the particularly skilled deer management in and around towns would encourage this to be undertaken in more situations.

Grey squirrel control is crucial to getting broadleaved species fully established in lowland Scotland and grant support towards this would help. Without this the palette of species, suitable to soil conditions, is very limited.

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

Please add your comments here.:

Members of STOG would be happy to be part of a brainstorming workshop for future methods of funding best suited to Local Authorities.

## About you

What is your name?

Name:

Scottish Tree Officers Group (STOG) – Operational Role

What is your email address?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Scottish Tree Officers Group (STOG) – Operational Role

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