

Response ID ANON-VEPG-2GRY-P

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
Submitted on 2023-05-17 16:08:31

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 gain their funding for planting, managing woodlands and public access within them from a variety of streams from both their own internal budgets (Revenue and Capital) and also from Scottish Government via Climate Change Funding, the Nature Recovery Fund (NRF) and for specific schemes via the Scottish Forestry Grant scheme / specific grants from NatureScot.

Most managers are better able to 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.

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.:

West Lothian Council owns >1000ha of woodland, most of which is used for public recreation, but in places are managed in a multi-purpose manner including producing timber. It also has some agricultural holdings but most of its land is not agricultural. Its larger sites and collections of sites within a neighbourhood are a combination of woodland, other semi-natural habitats or very often amenity grassland with trees. Funding mechanisms which were guided by whole site/area management plans appropriate to the land-use which cascade into grants for operations on the ground would encourage more holistic management and better use of overall resources.

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 of funding LAs directly but supported by a central technical team.

The technical advice and the funding it provides to Forest Research to assist all involved in forestry and woodland management is considered to be a valuable aspect of the work Scottish Forestry currently undertakes.

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 / staff costs would still have the necessary scrutiny.

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.:

Yes. This method of funding has not yet been assessed by the council. WLC is currently devoting most of its energy into reducing its CO2 but is aware that at some point will need to offset any residual CO2 emitted from providing its many services.

There may be opportunities to develop an appropriate local scheme to enable the council to offset its own excess CO2 in the first instance. Then, given West Lothian's location, with many local, national and international companies having offices / factories in the area, especially in Livingston, it is felt that there are opportunities for them to engage with local projects on public and private land.

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 areas across the Central Belt but may need additional funding for the smaller and more complex woods with infra-structure normally planted by LAs. There currently is no funding towards the large amount of communication with, and engagement and education of the public, which is required particularly for urban and peri-urban sites.

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 Officers, in this and other LAs throughout the UK, is that tree and woodland planting may be done without adequate thought to the long-term use and management of the woods and trees.

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?:

The current grant and felling permission application systems are difficult to use for more adaptive management of forests.

To inform this detailed discussion with the Continuous Cover Forestry Group and those who have decades of experience of using such systems (most often not as textbook shelterwood / selection felling silvicultural systems but adapting 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. This is particularly the case in areas of high public use where a great deal of time and effort is required to inform and manage the public during more frequent interventions required. This can be a disincentive to follow through on CCF operations for forests high public use (eg Beecraigs, Glentress) but in which the landscape benefit of this type of silviculture is greatest.

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.

Support with cashflow

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.:

Support for additional costs of fencing and maintenance of small areas.

Support for smaller scale planting areas <0.25ha – perhaps better delivered through local schemes as was previously done through Durham County Council's very successful Tree Cover Scheme and as being currently used 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 grant system is very different to those of other funders such as NatureScot / LandTrust / Paths4all with which officers are more familiar. A simpler system based on a project plan and actual costs, including maintenance.

The current grant rates are well below actual costs especially for sites with very difficult access and logistics which is the norm in these types of sites.

There are various mechanisms for supporting LAs, including the use of external trusts funded by Scottish Forestry and others. These may be good at individual project delivery but tend to be expensive for the LAs and are often seen as one-off interventions without any consideration for the long-term maintenance and management or the staff resources required.

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.:

In well-used areas for public access need 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. For LAs there is very often a need for education and informal awareness raising about woodland management in general as well as the specific project.

On LA sites there is a great opportunity to engage with large numbers of a mainly urban populace to increase understanding of woodland management on our own sites but even more importantly this 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 within timber once a tree is felled.

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 information and opportunity to comment to their wider community. Posters on local notice boards or on site may at least alert a larger number of people.

At WLC we have put up explanatory posters on site. It has also been noted that some new projects near Stirling have had attractive information boards erected by private forestry companies while work is being carried out. Something similar could be a requirement at the proposals stage, depending on scale and sensitivity.

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/arb apprenticeships within Local Authorities with good links between training and work experience so that each reinforces the other. LAs and Scottish Government organisations might be one way of providing 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. Where this not of direct long-term benefit to the LA, government or wider industry support would 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 for land-based ones. This is a more recent practice probably due to funding and staff shortages. If there were national requirements, as per social work, teaching, engineering etc then this would help to 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.:

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.

Woodland structure and extended rotations in existing woodlands may be as important as species in enhancing biodiversity. There is currently little encouragement to enhance this in the same way as there are higher levels of grants for native woodland planting.

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?:

Small scale mixed land use?:

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

Lack of grey squirrel control is crucial to getting broadleaved species in lowland Scotland and grant support towards this might enable more to be

undertaken. Without this, the palette of species, suitable to soil conditions and which will actually become established 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.:

About you

What is your name?

Name:

Eirwen Hopwood, Parks and Woodland Manager

What is your email address?

Email:

eirwen.hopwood@westlothian.gov.uk

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

West Lothian 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