

Farm woodland case studies

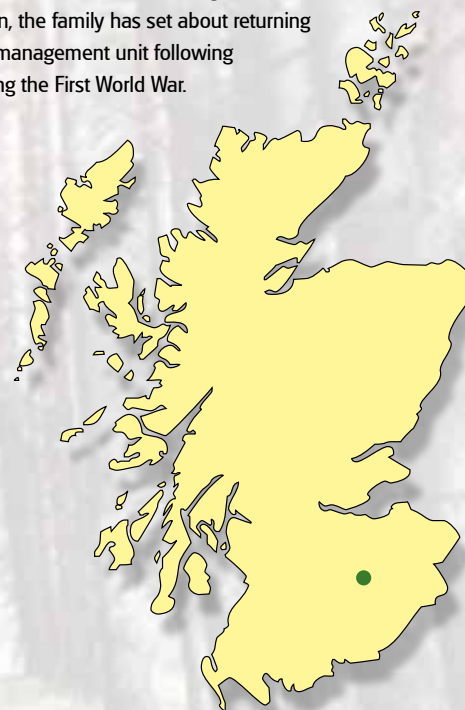
Netherurd Farm Peebles



Andrew Adamson

Netherurd Farm could be described as a jewel in the crown in the county of Peeblesshire. Situated in an almost treeless area, the shelter belts and blocks of woodland provide diversity and interest in an otherwise very open landscape.

Originally part of a larger estate, Andrew's father bought the farm in the late 1970s and, since then, the family has set about returning it to a more integrated land management unit following extensive deforestation during the First World War.



Extending to 223 hectares of marginal arable and hill land, Netherurd is eligible for LFASS and is stocked with up to 150 store cattle which Andrew buys in and finishes on the farm. The cattle run with around 820 hill ewes and lambs.

Although marginal for arable agriculture, Netherurd produces 32 hectares of crops including wheat, spring barley, fodder rape and swedes.

Like many contemporary farmers, Andrew and his father have converted the old farm buildings into houses and renovated existing cottages, providing additional income from rent.



There are six discrete areas of woodland on the farm, all over fifteen years old, ranging from 0.13 to 2.6 hectares in size. Four areas are predominantly Sitka Spruce and are destined to be clear felled. The other two areas are due for replanting following the acquisition of grants and will be managed to encourage natural regeneration. Many of the fields have mature 'policy' trees that somehow escaped the deforestation during the war. Andrew had planned to make use of grants for planting hedgerows under the SRDP but after repeatedly failing to reach the threshold by a couple of points, he feels the goalposts keep changing and has given up applying.

Across the farm there are a few isolated wet areas that have been fenced to exclude livestock; these have been planted with random trees and shrubs to enrich the farm habitat.



How it all adds up: the costs and benefits of farm woodland

Andrew values woodlands for shelter, amenity, biodiversity and fuel wood but does not assign monetary values to these benefits even though they clearly benefit the farm.

Andrew is currently replanting felled woodland and planting new woodland under the current SRDP Rural Priorities scheme. With the extension to the native woodland planting there will be a loss of 5 ha of grazing land but it is of little significance and is likely to have minimal impact on the stocking rate and future subsidy payments to the farm. On the replanting scheme will generate a surplus of grants over cost establishment of over £5000 over 15 years. The new planting of native woodland on 2.4 hectares will generate a surplus of £3100 over costs of establishment over 15 years.

Looking forward: where do we go from here?

Andrew is fully aware of the advantages of having trees. He values the shelter and protection they offer the farm, the bonus of having firewood there for the taking and he enjoys their aesthetic appeal over the changing seasons. He 'grew up with them and can't imagine the farm without them'. And the woodland adds value to the shoot.

Making the woodland work for the farm

Andrew does not believe in running livestock among the trees; he fears he'd be spending too much time looking for missing animals and worries that the ground would become poached. However, the woods and isolated ancient trees afford shelter and shade for stock as well as providing valuable habitat and wildlife corridors and a rearing ground for the 300 or so pheasants that the farm syndicate puts down each year.

Ultimately, Andrew plans to commercially clear fell the Sitka plantations and extract the timber when the price is right and grants are available for restocking. He is reluctant to thin them now because they are situated on exposed hillsides and are vulnerable to wind blow.

Whilst benefiting from the surrounding shelterbelts, the veteran policy trees are slowly dying. Although sorry to see them go Andrew is making good use of the firewood and is replacing them with what will become specimen trees in keeping with the original planting on the estate.

Like many farmers with a sustainable supply of fuel, Andrew has investigated the pros and cons of installing a biomass boiler but feels that the time isn't quite right, although the idea has by no means been completely shelved.



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