

FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND GUIDANCE NOTE 20 FOREST HABITAT NETWORKS AND SFGS EXPANSION GRANTS

Purpose

This note summarises how the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme supports the development of new native woodland to help create Forest Habitat Networks (FHNs). This note provides guidance in respect of new planting situations. It does not cover conversion or restoration to native woodland from non-native forest nor the management of existing native woodland. Restoration on native woodland on ancient woodland sites is covered in FCS Guidance Note 26.

Background

Although all types of woodland supported by SFGS should have some input of FHN principles, those grants which are key to facilitating the expansion of native woodland through forest habitat networks are:

- P2 Grant to expand the area of native woodland
- P3 Grant to improve riparian habitat

(S3 and Restocking grants can be used to manage existing native woodland and help convert or restore non-native forest to native woodland. Grants S4: (improving woodland biodiversity) and S6 (alternatives to clear fell) can be used to facilitate the development of ecological connections through the wider conifer non-native forest matrix.)

SFGS Grants

P2 Grant to expand the area of native woodland

The purpose of this grant is “to expand the area of native woodlands, preferably through natural regeneration and the development Forest Habitat Networks”.

Under the published eligibility criteria for applications, to contribute to Forest Habitat Networks there must normally be either of two categories of ‘*source woodland*’ nearby:

- existing native woodland within 300 metres of the proposed new woodland; or
- areas of non-native forests within 300 metres of the proposed new woodland which meet the criteria for conversion to native woodlands as detailed in the practice guide ‘Restoration of Native Woodland on Ancient Woodland Sites’.

Eligible categories of source woods

'Existing native woodlands': includes both planted and semi-natural woods, whether on ancient woodland sites or not, where the canopy is predominantly composed of site-native species. There should normally be at least 0.5ha of native woodland in a single patch, but where the wood is directly linked to the proposed site, or in areas such as the southern uplands where remnants are typically small, the minimum area could be smaller if justifiable.

Areas of non-native woodland which meet the criteria for conversion to native woodland: (see FC(S) g/n 26) these are PAWS sites (preferably under the same ownership as the intended area of new planting) which have a 'high' or 'medium' restoration potential assessed using the Forest Practice Guide (above) and where full restoration is either underway or intended under an approved plan. Again the minimum size should normally be 0.5ha (as above). Where the PAWS site shows a low potential for restoration, a justification will be required to support the new planting application, and Silvan House approval will be required.

Natural colonisation

Natural colonisation is the preferred method of establishing new native woodlands. The critical factor in determining maximum distance from the source woodland is the distance over which effective colonisation by the desired native species is likely to occur (in some cases this may be less than 300m). In these situations it is expected that the suitable 'tree colonisation distance' will normally also be an effective yardstick for colonisation by acceptable native species.

Enrichment planting

If stocking by natural regeneration is only partially successful and is unlikely to achieve the minimum density agreed within the plan of operations then it is acceptable practice to carry out enrichment planting with acceptable species.

New planting

Under option P2 (expanding the area of native woodland) new planting can be eligible for grant, but only if we agree that natural regeneration will not be successful. For example it is recognised that natural regeneration is unlikely to occur on many improved pasture or arable sites due to soil fertility and competition from vegetation. In these cases, the expectation is that the 'source' wood will provide a future source of supply of the less mobile woodland species

which can eventually colonise the new wood. Woods which are linked, or in close proximity to each other, should also support higher populations of more mobile species than more isolated woods of the same size. In making a decision as to whether proposals are justified we will therefore need to have regard to the ownership of the source wood; the nature of the 'source' wood; the size of the gap; the nature of the linkages between the proposed new planting and the 'source' wood; and the relative sizes of the proposed new planting and the source wood.

Distance of new planting from source woods

The 300m criterion is intended to target funding of new planting on areas with the best prospects for natural colonisation by native trees and shrubs and for colonisation of associated species, in the medium to long term. The acceptable distance for individual proposals will depend on the expected ability of species to 'move through the landscape'. This will depend on the local landscape character, the ecological linkages and other features present within the 'gap' – (see below). This rule may be relaxed for sites in areas zoned for native woodland in agreed Strategic Forest Habitat Network plans where there will be a high probability of future 'infill' of native woodland. Thus in some circumstances it will be appropriate to exceed 300m.

Distance to nearest 'source wood' should be lower where:

- Natural colonisation prospects for associated woodland species are poor
- intervening land is intensively managed agriculture (e.g. arable/improved pasture) or built development
- there are no woodland, hedgerow or other suitable habitat features linking the proposed site to the existing native wood (PAWS site); or
- the 'source' native wood is small (under 2 ha) and/or of low ecological quality

Distance to nearest 'source wood' could be greater where:

- there are other well-linked woodland habitat features in the landscape (including non-native woodland, mixed woods, riparian woods and hedgerows) which provide good ecological connection between the proposed new planting and existing native woods
- the intervening open land is mainly semi-natural vegetation, not intensively managed for agriculture: and
- the 'source' native wood(s) are of good size (over 5 ha) and ecological quality

Relative size of source wood and new planting

The relative size of source woodland and proposed new planting scheme will affect the chances of successful colonisation by woodland species from the former into the latter. We will therefore normally expect the area of proposed new native woodland planting to be up to ten times the total area of existing source woodland. This rule may be relaxed for sites in areas zoned for native woodland in agreed Strategic Forest Habitat Network plans where there will be a high probability of future 'infill' of native woodland.

P3 Grant to improve riparian habitat

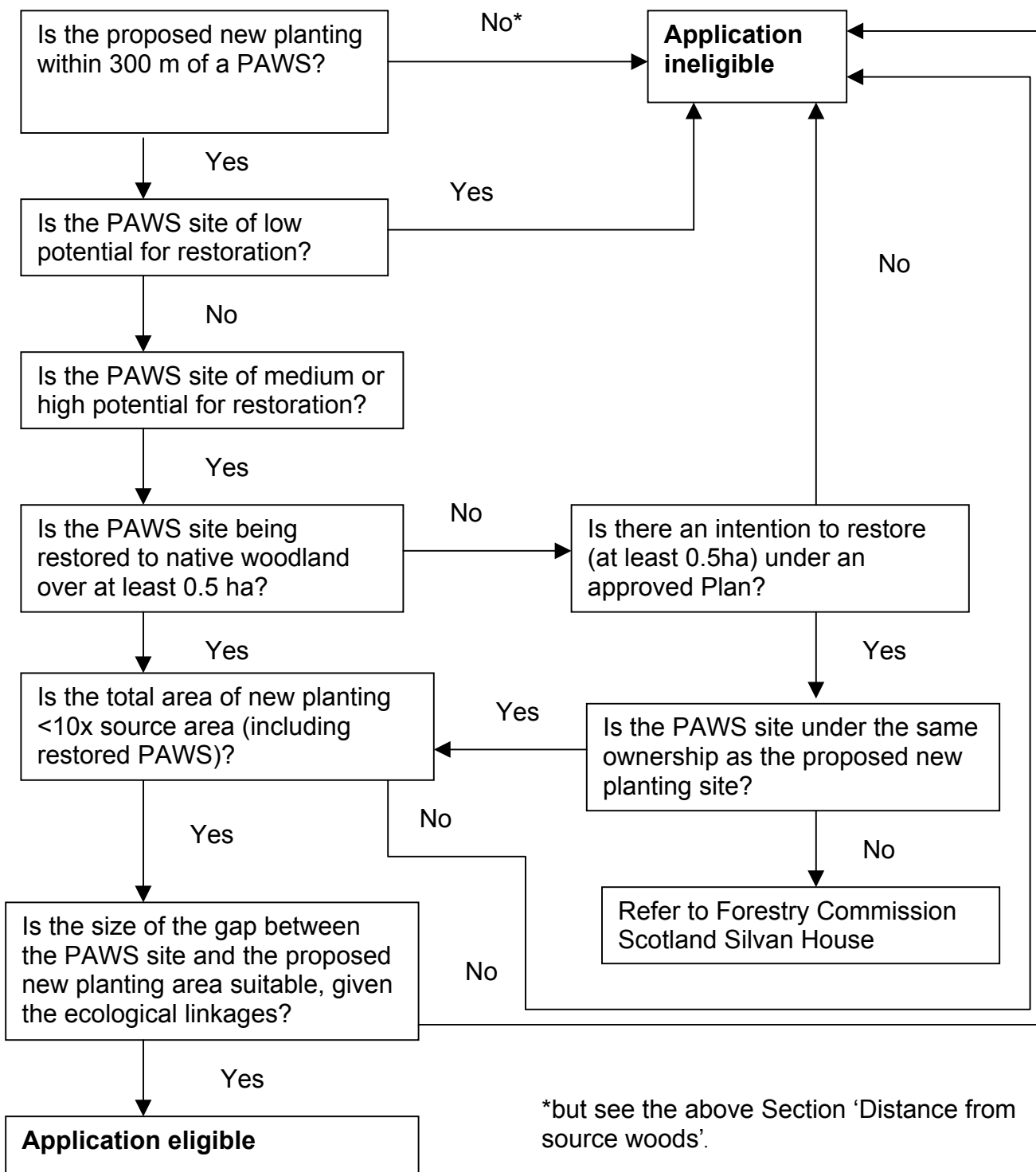
The purpose of this grant is "to create new riparian and floodplain woodlands." No specific distance rule for linkage to existing native woodlands is required, although linkage to existing riparian woods and contribution to a FHN will be expected.

Some riparian woods will also meet the P2 criteria for proximity to existing native woodlands thus qualifying them for P2 grant for a wider area of new native woodland (ie beyond the riparian zone). For those that do not meet the P2 eligibility criteria, the P3 grant will normally be confined to the physical boundaries of the riparian zone. This rule may be relaxed for sites in areas zoned for native woodland in agreed Strategic Forest Habitat Network plans where there will be a high probability of future 'infill' of native woodland.

P2 Expanding the Area of Native Woodland and SFGS

Flowchart for determining eligibility of proposed new planting:

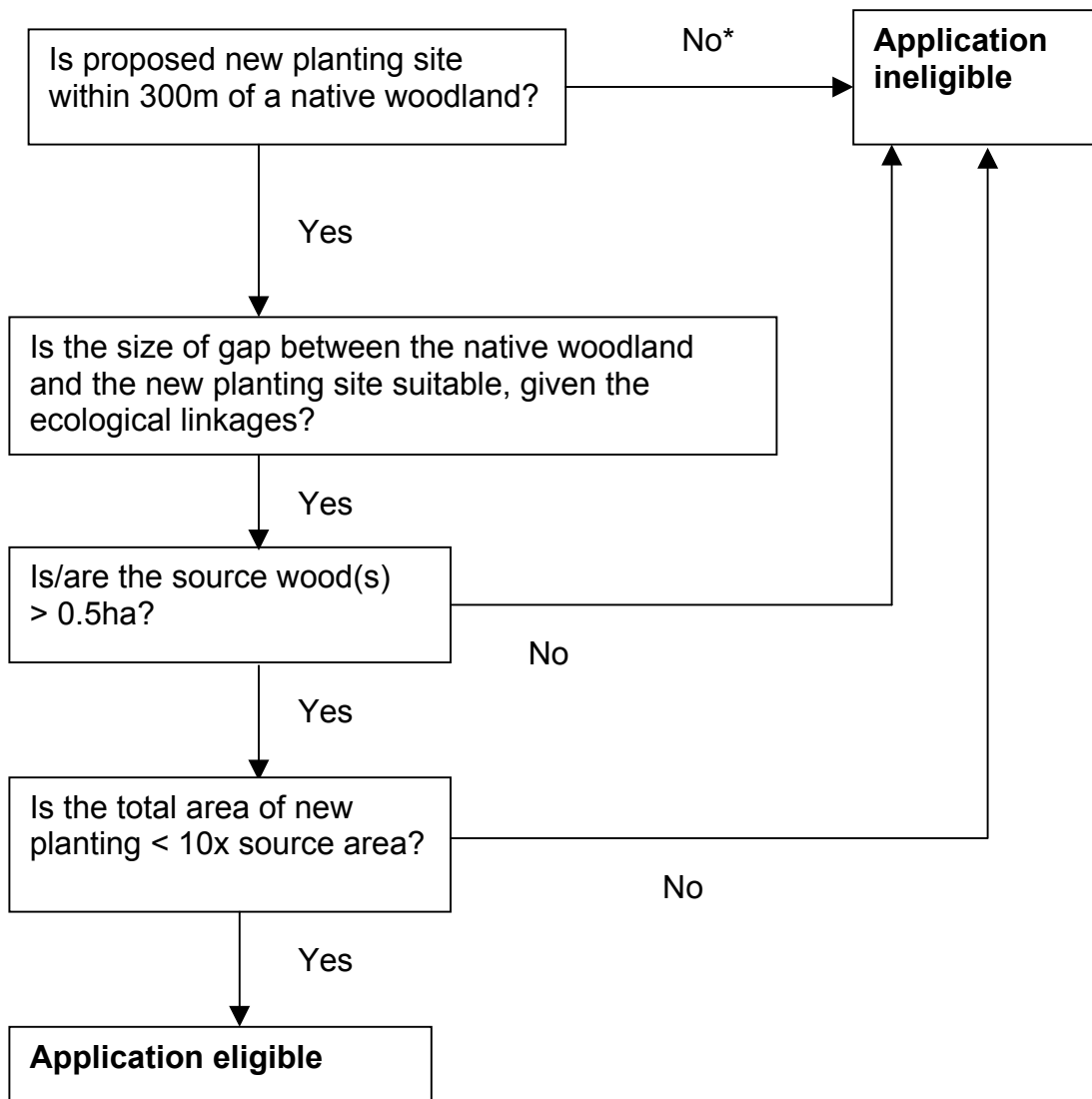
a) 'Source' PAWS sites



P2 Expanding the Area of Native Woodland and SFGS

Flowchart for determining eligibility of proposed new planting:

b) 'Source' Native Woodland sites



**but see the above Section 'Distance from source woods'.*