

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
Submitted on 2023-05-11 08:30:40

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?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The basic principle of FGS is successful in generally promoting woodland expansion, especially among private landowners.

Grant support for forestry should be a discrete scheme. However, as noted in the consultation, key is that forestry proposals have consideration for other land uses and compliment them where possible and desirable. Strongly support and encourage development of a scheme which provides best value to the public purse and which maximises the delivery of both public and environmental benefits.

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.:

Certain aspects of agricultural funding support and encouraged cooperative actions between adjacent landowners to provide that bigger picture view and maximise the benefits of actions and spend. We are not aware of the same options or push within the current forestry grant scheme but collaboration could and should help deliver on aspects such as nature networks.

Would it possible to "add" woodland areas to established/granted schemes given the long term nature of forestry/tree growth, if the farming area of the farm/estate required to be changed from a business perspective (eg the sheep enterprise was no longer profitable and relevant pasture area looked to be established as trees) – no need for a new scheme to be started from scratch in the enterprise.

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.:

Preparing woodland ecosystems for climate change through adaptation practices – this includes well demonstrated practices but also allowing for experimental/research approaches to understand further how we can prepare woodlands across the country for climate change with the most minimal impact on biodiversity. There are learnings that we can take from across the world – e.g. recent forest fires from extreme heat events in other countries, pests and diseases no longer limited/controlled by climate.

The type of woodland environmental scheme being established should be considered relevant to the grant values attached. Short term quick return commercial woodlands may perhaps have less grant assistance allocated in comparison to longer term establishment for continued net zero implications.

The FGS needs to ensure that the proposed woodland is specified to suit existing site conditions, and includes a woodland maintenance plan to ensure the trees are managed to maturity to reach optimum proportions that can then withstand pressure from future storms.

The assessment of existing carbon stores in proposed areas for tree planting and the whole life impacts of tree planting needs to be well understood and assessed for proposals.

Beyond the resilience of woodlands and forests, key is to understand and promote how trees and woodland can assist society and the environment to adapt to a changing climate - how and where can tree planting aid through shading, flood management, habitat connectivity etc. Grants should be enhanced where there are wider ecosystem services or societal benefits from planting.

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.:

Given the challenges now facing society and the environment, any policy to maximise future total investment in future natural capital has to be a positive.

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.:

Increase the funding and/or differentiate the levels awarded depending on the types of schemes being proposed.

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?:

They need to be managed based on adaptation to future climate change predictions. Understanding how the whole woodland ecosystem is working together now and start analysing the risks to this system early so they are best mitigated against well in advance.

All FGS agreements should require related management and maintenance plans to specifically address what will be done at the planned woodland to address resilience to the effects of climate change, and also resilience to the main pests and diseases.

A named qualified and experienced forester should then be allocated the FGS scheme to advise the FGS applicant at regular intervals, say every two years, on woodland management and maintenance issues such as climate change and resilience to pests and disease.

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, Intervention level, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

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.:

Appropriate grant allocated to individual schemes.

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.:

Forestry grants can generally support an increase in easily accessible, sustainably managed woodland in urban and peri-urban areas by (1) supporting local community groups with aspirations to develop a piece of urban/peri-urban land into woodland with forestry expertise and advice, and (2) assist with progressing management and maintenance plans for urban and peri-urban woodland. Community woodland schemes just as important and can offer more "people benefits" than large rural ones. Less dense planting needs to be recognised as required and scheme grants allow for this.

From the outset of establishing a woodland its fundamental purpose, be it recreation, increasing ecological value, timber production or a mixture of the three should underpin any related management and maintenance.

Grants for woodland management in these urban and peri-urban areas can be very beneficial in improving habitat structure and diversity as well as improving opportunities for amenity and recreation. Land values are high and competition for land can be significant, so allowing for flexibility to support smaller woodlands, for flexibility in management operations and goals and providing direct advice and support to community groups and local authorities is key.

Grants should not be short term or disqualify you from other grants – so that managing woodlands in these types of areas can be seen as a long term project. It gives confidence to those interested in running the project from the start. Maintaining the woodland will be key and this can't be done with one off grants/short term funding.

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.:

Majority of comment on Q9 applies.

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 grant scheme should provide a clear expectation of the scope of a community consultation exercise. Consultation must meet a minimum standard before any application is valid. The industry needs to accept the need and value of true consultation and resource it adequately.

It may be that Local Authorities could assist in providing input on community wishes and needs. However, the resource limitation of Local Authorities needs to be recognised.

At application stage, the public register IT portal is poor. All relevant documents associated with each application should be available for public viewing. The Scottish Governments ePlanning portal that is made available to all Local Authorities could provide a suitable model to base development of a better system.

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.:

Clear public reporting on where the grants have gone – consider fair distribution across the country.

As per question 11 – better develop the public portal/register so it is user friendly and displays all relevant information.

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?

Yes

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

Capital funding should be provided alongside revenue funding – it can be difficult for capital only spend when it needs revenue to develop it and run it after planting has taken place.

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

No comment

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.:

No comment

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.:

Careful judgement is needed over each bid for grant money to ensure it supports biodiversity. It should not just be about the economic development/growth potential of forestry. There may also be a conflict over this especially if net zero is the focus as this could simply amplify the challenges of single species, fast growing timber to sequester carbon which will not be resilient to climate change or benefit biodiversity.

The FGS should strongly support the control and eradication of non-native plant and animal species in woodland, it should promote and facilitate and landscape approach where networks of habitat are protected and enhanced and it should promote and support a long term view of woodlands as it will take decades for any 'new' woodland to develop into a high biodiversity resource. Long term (permanent) retention of trees should be given support. 'Under-management' is not always an issue. We do not need to 'utilise' all woodlands. The scheme should encourage and support a more enlightened view of woodland management where soils, tree decay and dead wood are seen as key habitats rather than forgotten or as problems. The scheme needs to settle on and strongly support suitable and viable alternatives to the clear-fell model with targets set for the amount on forestry that will follow this approach. Forestry needs to better consider existing habitat value on the sites it plants.

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?:

Grants need to take into consideration the costs of appropriate tree protection and fencing of areas to prevent animal (wild and in some cases farmed) damage. Also mechanisms should be in place to claw back grant monies if schemes are not appropriately managed.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Grants need to take into consideration the costs of appropriate tree protection and fencing of areas to prevent animal (wild and in some cases farmed) damage. Also mechanisms should be in place to claw back grant monies if schemes are not appropriately managed.

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

Please add your comments here.:

Overall, the potential public benefits of woodland planting mean that it is beneficial to support it. The key challenge for the new scheme is common to the old schemes also - maximising those public and community benefits and not supporting schemes that are environmentally detrimental. Certainly in Aberdeenshire, a rush for new extensive, non-native conifer plantations, bolstered by carbon markets, could move community perception of forestry back to that of the late 80's and early 90's - some already see it is threatening, wasteful, ill-judged and economically questionable. Consultation and public communication are key as are visibly delivering public and community benefits. Public money for public good.

About you

What is your name?

Name:
[redacted]

What is your email address?

Email:
[redacted]

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:
Aberdeenshire Council

Scottish Forestry would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response only (without 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