

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?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Having a discrete grant support scheme for forestry has a long track record of successful delivery for the forestry industry. Having this discrete area of focussed grant support works very well and should therefore continue to ensure similar success in the future.

Complementarity (as mentioned below) and integration with other land uses and desired land use outcomes does however require sufficient read across with other grant schemes and support packages, particularly in the encouragement of farm woodland management and planting as well as agro-forestry measures.

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.:

In recent years grant incentives have led to a much higher proportion of large scale planting or management schemes with investment from the private investment sector and more absentee landownership. A greater focus of incentivisation to encourage existing land managers / farmers to incorporate forestry and woodland into an ongoing agricultural activity would be welcomed. This may involve woodland management, new planting or adoption of agro-forestry measures.

Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions could be expanded to include minimum standards for sustainable woodland management, which would be supported through grant aid.

A different approach to a grant structure which makes funding multiple landowners more straightforward would help with sustainable forestry management – particularly deer management and control of invasive non-natives.

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.:

Continuing to encourage woodland expansion, using similar mechanisms to the current FGS is an obvious priority.

Incorporating a greater degree of encouragement and incentivisation for the development of woodland habitat networks across the farming landscape will provide wider benefits for resilience and climate change adaptation

Sustainable management of existing woodlands, particularly within the farming landscape is lacking. These woodlands have a significant role to play in resilience and adaptation to climate change. Encouragement and incentivisation is required to address the lack of management.

Creating a grant scheme with some flexibility would be advantageous, enabling incentives to be adapted as new information becomes available; particularly with regard to climate change and biodiversity loss.

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,

Not sure

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The current, market led, success in utilizing grants and carbon funding favours private investors and large-scale woodland planting schemes. In order to encourage existing land managers to adopt the land use change required to achieve national planting targets incentives need to focus on delivering more smaller, farm scale woodland creation, activity which is currently proving harder to deliver.

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.:

Incorporating a greater degree of encouragement and incentivisation for the development of woodland habitat networks across the farming landscape will provide wider benefits for resilience and climate change adaptation – the creation of linear habitat corridors will necessarily involve a higher quantity of fencing than conventional woodland creation schemes, this would need to be allowed for in any grant scheme's scoring criteria.

Sustainable management of existing woodlands, particularly within the farming landscape is lacking. These woodlands have a significant role to play in resilience and adaptation to climate change. Encouragement and incentivisation is required to address the lack of management.

Incorporating natural regeneration into woodland creation areas through fencing / reduction in grazing pressures will provide a low cost means of woodland expansion, provided a longer timescale for establishment is accepted.

Funding packages and mechanisms could recognise the different issues and challenges to woodland creation and management in urban and urban fringe locations. This could be through support of different approaches to establishment (e.g. planting densities) as well as different management regimes, recognising the very different challenges and threats to establishment in these locations.

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?:

A more open-minded approach to species mixes in 'native' broadleaved woodland creation schemes may be beneficial. Including species native to England but not Scotland would increase resilience, provided any additions are treated on a case-by-case basis, bring biodiversity value to native species and any likely to move this way because of climate change, and are only ever a minor component in mixes.

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, Intervention level, 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.:

Additional (geographically) targeted grant incentives to help deliver specific woodland creation objectives identified in regional strategies, such as the Clyde Climate Forest and the Central Scotland Green Network. This targeted approach can provide a higher grant intervention rate where small scale woodlands will help to deliver multiple benefits.

Small green spaces often serve multiple purposes in higher population density areas – the exclusivity of a woodland creation scheme may put off applicants; could a grant model be created which has a focus on tree planting, but also facilitates alternative biodiversity benefits (ponds / wildflowers / wetlands)?

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.:

Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) is a good mechanism to support accessibility and sustainable management of urban and peri urban woodlands.

However, the requirement to get an approved management plan prior to applying for capital (WIG) grants can be a dis-incentive when:

- A high level of commitment (time, resource and money) is required to get management plan produced and approved, particularly for community groups.
- The cost of producing the management plans far exceeds the grant available for the work.
- Scottish Forestry are unable to progress with management plan approvals within a practicable timeframe, due to other priorities (woodland creation grant applications) and capacity issues.

Streamlining the management planning process, reviewing the grant rate and giving these projects equal priority ranking within Scottish Forestry (to woodland creation) would all help to increase WIAT activity.

Providing additional support to community groups, to enable them to more easily access professional advice and support, particularly to help with the production of woodland management plans, would help drive greater sustainable woodland management.

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.:

Providing additional support to community groups, to enable them to more easily access professional advice and support, particularly to help with the production of woodland management plans, would help drive greater sustainable woodland management.

Setting aside silvicultural and ecological knowledge, an ability to use mapping software and a competence with excel are essential to many / most FGS applications. These skills are not always available within the interested parties of rural communities.

Unlike many other grant mechanisms, forestry grants are therefore only accessible to those who have a reasonable degree of forestry knowledge and technical expertise (or access to a professional forestry advisor). Addressing these issues would help communities access grants directly themselves. For example an in-house online application / mapping tool that produced basic maps and schedules of work to FGS specifications would greatly increase the accessibility of schemes, as well as expedite approvals as it would eliminate need for small-scale edits with maps and formatting issues on applications.

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.:

Large scale schemes often leave communities feeling "done to" rather than "done with".

A threshold, whereby schemes above a certain size, have to include an element of community benefit (similar to windfarm developments) could help address this issue.

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.:

Often after submitting an FGS application, you are unclear when it will be approved / returned, and the timeframes for response seems variable and relative to the volume of applications being processed. Greater clarity on processes and timeframes (clearing round etc) would assist this – and reduce the need to contact SF directly for an update.

The current system for the general public to view and monitor planning applications – using a web-based portal - where all the information relating to a planning application can be viewed is very transparent and fully informative. A similar system would be beneficial for communities to better understand forestry applications.

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?:

Control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) is a significant challenge to sustainable woodland management. Encouraging business and skills development in this area of activity would help to both address sustainable woodland management and skills development.

Community groups often fail to access professional forestry and woodland advice and therefore do not progress with woodland management planning and sustainable woodland management as a consequence. Providing a mechanism which will assist with this could easily be linked with skills development, through mentoring provided to community groups.

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.:

There is clearly a skills and capacity issue within the forestry sector. In order to focus assistance where it is needed most, a more flexible, regional approach (through the conservancies) may be better from Scottish Forestry, rather than a national approach through the FGS mechanism.

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.:

In order to achieve the objectives of significant reductions in biodiversity loss and an increase in native woodland cover, alterations to the FGS alone won't suffice; complimentary changes to other agricultural subsidy schemes will be required. It would be preferable if FGS and relevant schemes were complementary and worked together for unified goals or they will be at risk of 'out-subsidising' competing schemes.

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?:

Central Scotland Local Authorities and other landowners are reticent to involve themselves in active deer control due to fear of negative PR. A more robust public relations campaign on the necessity of deer control led by Scottish Forestry would help such landowners begin to control their deer numbers. Such an initiative could be reinforced through a grant scheme requiring landowners to submit deer cull numbers, on receipt of which a payment would be made towards the costs of deer management.

On very large woodland creation schemes a cost / feasibility analysis could be conducted reviewing what method of browsing control is most appropriate between fencing and robust deer control through stalkers.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Beyond deer fencing, alternatives to prevent browsing are few on small scale schemes – tubes prevent trees from being browsed but leaves all other ground flora exposed. The potential benefits of improved ground flora diversity are not a factor considered when comparing the merits of tubes / fencing in small scale woodland creation grant schemes – so could be better incorporated into FGS assessment criteria.

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

Please add your comments here.:

To help deliver the CSGN vision and support new woodland planting, a CSGN contribution uplift of between £750 to £2,500 per hectare (ha) was available under the Forestry Grant Scheme's woodland creation options.

The Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) is a National Development embedded within the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework. The additional grant support available through the current Forestry Grant Scheme has been critical to delivering new woodland planting within the CSGN area and therefore helping Scottish Government achieve this national development, as well as its woodland creation targets.

Other initiatives such as the Clyde Climate Forest have recently benefited from additional payment incentives to help encourage woodland creation in specific target areas.

In order to ensure that Scottish Government's planning objectives, woodland creation targets and biodiversity outcomes are achieved we believe that any future grant schemes must continue to provide the necessary additional incentives to both the CSGN region and specific target areas.

The co-benefits of nature-based solutions must be clear – we should tackle climate and nature degradation in a way that brings health and wellbeing benefits, and reduces health inequalities too. These multiple benefits are particularly relevant and well documented in urban and peri-urban trees and woodlands. We would therefore welcome a revitalised grant mechanism and re-prioritisation of the sustainable management of these urban and peri-urban trees, ensuring their appropriate management for the future.

Covering letter submitted also as part of submission.-

On behalf of the Board of the Green Action Trust and the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) Partnership please find attached consultation response on the future of Grant Support for Forestry.

We would particularly highlight the following:

1) The Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) is a National Development embedded within the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework. The additional grant support available through the current Forestry Grant Scheme has been critical to delivering new woodland planting within the CSGN area and therefore helping Scottish Government achieve this national development, as well as its woodland creation targets.

Other initiatives such as the Clyde Climate Forest have recently benefited from additional payment incentives to help encourage woodland creation in specific target areas.

In order to ensure that Scottish Government's planning objectives, woodland creation targets and biodiversity outcomes are achieved we believe that any future grant schemes must continue to provide the necessary additional incentives to both the CSGN region and specific target areas.

2) The benefits of urban and peri-urban trees and woodlands are now well documented, as are the various ways they will help in adapting to the effects of climate change. We would therefore welcome a revitalised grant mechanism and re-prioritisation of the sustainable management of these urban and peri-urban trees, ensuring their appropriate management for the future.

Thank you, in anticipation, for your consideration of our consultation response. We would welcome the opportunity for further discussion, on any of these points, should that be helpful.

About you

What is your name?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Green Action Trust

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