

SCOTTISH FORESTRY'S PRIORITIES IN RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY

Introduction

1. We're working across Scotland to support the Scottish Government's response to COVID-19.
2. Over the past months we have worked with our staff and stakeholders across the wider forestry sector to produce our first Corporate Plan and, on behalf of Scottish Ministers, Scotland's Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan. Both of these documents were due to be published on 1 April.
3. However, given the ongoing Covid-19 emergency we have decided to postpone their publication.
4. We have mobilised our Business Continuity Plan and prioritised our activities. We are working in partnership with the forestry sector and other partner organisations, including colleagues across the wider Scottish government family. This will ensure that we are able to target our efforts at those activities that will have the most positive impact on the forestry sector during this emergency.
5. Our primary focus is on protecting the safety and wellbeing of Scottish Forestry staff and continuing to function as a public agency, supporting the forestry sector, now and in the medium-to-longer term.

Our Priorities

6. Our prioritisation of work has focused on our statutory, financial and contractual responsibilities, and on the activities that will be of most immediate concern to our customers. We are therefore prioritising:
 - The processing and payment of grant claims to customers who have already funded and completed work;
 - Managing and supporting the forward programme of woodland creation, including statutory requirements around EIAs;
 - Managing and approval of 2020-21 Timber Transport Fund applications;
 - Approval of project support for 2020-21 applications that involve funding third party staffing;
 - Statutory Plant Health surveillance and reporting; and
 - Continued processing of official correspondence, FOIs, PQs to agreed deadlines.

Helping to protect the public and our people

7. In line with SG guidelines on social distancing we have completed a managed transition towards almost exclusively home-based working, both for our National Office in Silvan House and for our Conservancies. Our offices and conservancies will be closed to minimise the need for staff to travel. We will work with our suppliers and grant recipients to ensure that where ever possible payments continue to be made.
8. We will continue to follow SG guidelines to protect our employees and where necessary review and revise our protocols and ways of working as guidance around Coronavirus is updated.
9. As part of the public sector-wide redeployment of staff to business-critical functions of the Scottish Government, we will temporarily transfer staff out of Scottish Forestry to provide much needed resilience and support to wider Scottish priorities.

Our support to the forestry sector

10. We are actively working to support the forestry sector and communicate the key elements of our plans and the implications this will have for our customers via our website, and through our usual channels of communication, such as the monthly email to forestry agents. We will actively invite their reaction and feedback.
11. We are working closely with Confor who will act as a central hub for gathering in intelligence and information from the sector Confor has launched an information service for members and the wider industry which will provide an invaluable communication channel for the sector (<http://www.confor.org.uk/covid-19>.)
12. Creating that single source of intelligence and information will allow us to take a comprehensive and strategic view of the impacts being experienced by the sector, and of the potential interventions that might make the most difference to forestry, over and above the more generic support being offered to businesses by both the UK and Scottish Governments. We will also continue to feed forestry intelligence into the cross-SG effort to support the rural economy.
13. We are also staying in touch with our English and Welsh counterparts, which will be important for priority issues such as tree health, intelligence on UK and international markets and business health, and in the longer term for the recovery of the sector.