

Response ID ANON-VEPG-2GRJ-7

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
Submitted on 2023-05-17 15:27:14

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.:

It is important that the scheme is designed and administered by those with a working understanding of the complexities of the forestry sector and the delivery of new woodland creation and ongoing woodland management. This should include greater control of grants and payments by Scottish Forestry and removal of the requirement to claim annual recurrent payments through the Single Application Form. The current requirements can be overly complex for some applicants. The scheme should be developed to encourage better integration with and opportunities for woodland on farms and to promote the better management of existing woodlands.

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.:

To assist woodland management, as opposed to new woodland creation, forestry could be included in the tier 1 payments in a similar manner to agriculture. To achieve this a base rate of funding linked to a UKFS management plan, complementary to the current scheme could be introduced to enable existing forests to realise greater environmental, social and economic value. There is the potential to design this in such a way as to be simple and easily accessible with management plans containing measurable outcomes to justify public funding. There could be an option to enhance payments for specific outcomes.

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.:

The support package should evolve to respond to the UKFS as compliance with the standard should enable the response to the climate emergency, net zero and resilience in woodlands and forests. This assumes that the UKFS is well informed and based upon accurate, well researched evidence and that the support package is simple, easy to use and accessible.

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.:

Unable to answer this without further information on the detail of how private finance would be integrated into the support mechanism and whether this is likely to lead to detrimental unintended consequences and failure to meet targets if this disincentivises uptake of FGS grants due to complexity.

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.:

See answer to Q2. Also, specific targeted grants could be used to achieve required outcomes. There is precedent for this in grants such as the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, The Grampian Forest Challenge Fund and the Native Pinewood Scheme, all designed to incentivise a particular target over and above the base delivery through the standard support mechanism.

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?:

As per Q3, compliance with UKFS, which is a requirement of the support should enable compliance with climate and pest and disease resilience.

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, Flexibility within options, Intervention level

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.:

A simplified application procedure, increased grant rates and support with cash flow.

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.:

Again, this relates to grant rates and intervention levels and criteria. These woodlands are costly to establish and maintain due to higher land values and ongoing management issues which are often linked to vandalism and/or lack of maintenance of fixed equipment. The Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) eligibility criteria and zoning could be improved to deliver in peri-urban areas.

An aspect which is not strictly associated with FGS is the education of communities on antisocial behaviour and crime which impact on woodland provision and management to the detriment of the benefits of woodland to communities.

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.:

Forests and woodlands can provide a wide range of opportunities in relation to community wealth building through woodland access, forest schools, local employment, leisure activities, all of which would benefit from improved financial backing from the FGS.

If communities are utilising forests as a resource, then there should be support for creation and maintenance of infrastructure in the woodland to enable communities to access and utilise them.

However, forestry does not have upfront income unlike other land use changes (for example wind farm installation) but it can provide significant non monetary benefits to support community wealth building.

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 existing public register should be reviewed and improved to provide better information on grant aided applications, the steps taken to comply with UKFS and to include a section on frequently asked questions to enable information provision on the main issues raised by consultees on FGS applications.

Better guidance on what is required and expected in community engagement and what constitutes community as there is criticism that often a minority express an opinion that does not reflect the majority. This should include guidance on when Scottish Government overarching Policy has higher priority over local issues, particularly in the context of land use change, Climate and Biodiversity crises where a significant compromise may be required.

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.:

The existing public register should be reviewed and improved to provide better information on grant aided applications, the steps taken to comply with UKFS and to include a section on frequently asked questions to enable information provision on the main issues raised by consultees on FGS applications.

The current register is difficult to navigate and does not contain sufficient information for interested parties to understand the decision process or the work that has been undertaken to address issues, including inclusion of community benefit in design.

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?:

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.:

It is questionable whether the FGS is the most appropriate mechanism to deliver training within the sector or whether this should be supported through economic development. If this is considered appropriate then it should be as a specific additional ring fenced fund and should be structured to provide support to small business and to de risk the provision of training positions and equipment for trainees.

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.:

Effective deer management is costly, whether by exclusion through fencing or population control at scale. Land ownership patterns and conflicting land uses can limit opportunities for landscape scale deer management and in those situations fencing remains the most appropriate means of establishing woodland and this should be recognised. A review of deer management support is necessary to consider the practicalities of non fencing methods, including the training and support of those carrying out stalking, the requirement for carcass handling and processing facilities and the provision of appropriate eligibility criteria to enable a sufficient level of support to ensure delivery. This should include a recognition of the prolonged period of support necessary to achieve outcomes, especially natural regeneration of native woodlands and palatable species when populations require to be monitored and maintained for decades to achieve successful establishment.

Current regeneration grants are not sufficient to incentivise natural regeneration or management of native woodlands. The mechanism within the FGS to encourage regeneration needs to be reviewed.

The use of regional incentives to achieve particular outcomes should be included in the FGS. As mentioned previously, there is precedent for this in grants such as the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, The Grampian Forest Challenge Fund and the Native Pinewood Scheme, all designed to incentivise a particular target over and above the base delivery through the standard support mechanism.

The focus within the FGS is, rightly, weighted towards new woodland creation. However, greater emphasis should be placed on the biodiversity, social and climate change benefits derived from well managed existing woodlands and recognition of the cost of delivering those benefits and encouragement for more owners to provide these benefits through a form of management grant linked to an outcome plan.

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?:

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Small scale mixed land use?:

Effective deer management is costly, whether by exclusion through fencing or population control at small scale. Land ownership patterns and conflicting land uses can limit opportunities for deer management and in those situations fencing remains the most appropriate means of establishing woodland and this should be recognised. A review of deer management support is necessary to consider the practicalities of non fencing methods, including the training and support of those carrying out stalking, the requirement for carcass handling and processing facilities and the provision of appropriate eligibility criteria to enable a sufficient level of support to ensure delivery. This should include a recognition of the prolonged period of support necessary to achieve outcomes, especially natural regeneration of native woodlands and palatable species when populations require to be monitored and maintained for decades to achieve successful establishment.

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

Please add your comments here.:

About you

What is your name?

Name:

[Redacted]

What is your email address?

Email:

[Redacted]

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Individual

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

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

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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