

GUIDANCE ABOUT WOODLAND CREATION ON AGRICULTURAL LAND

Purpose

1. To provide guidance, primarily for FCS Conservancy and RPID staff, on the implementation of WEAG¹ recommendations relating to woodland creation on agricultural land.

Background

2. The WEAG report included the following recommendations:

Recommendation 3: Types of land for tree planting.

To help reduce conflicts between woodland creation and other land uses, our advice to the Cabinet Secretary is that the following considerations should be taking into account when making decisions about the location of new woodlands:

- *The focus of woodland expansion should be away from prime agricultural land, but it should be recognised that there may be important opportunities for small scale tree planting, for example, on field margins, along water courses or to improve the environment in and around towns;*
- *On other (non-prime) arable land, agriculture is likely to remain the primary land use, although there may be scope for woodland creation on a slightly larger scale. The quality of the land in a local context, and its environmental sensitivity, should be considered;*
- *Grazing land has significant potential for the creation of high quality and high value woodlands. However, this should be achieved in ways that seek to avoid adverse impacts on local patterns of agriculture and that aim to complement and enhance the agricultural and environmental value of the remaining unplanted land;*
- *Protected places have the potential for woodland creation, much of which is likely to be of native species. Here, opportunities should be taken to create woodlands which make a positive contribution to the environmental value of the site and the ecosystem services it provides;*
- *Land in and around towns, including vacant and derelict land, should be used for tree planting where it can make a cost-effective contribution to remediation and improving the quality of life in urban areas;*
- *Upland red deer range has the potential for the creation of significant areas of woodland, especially where it can provide shelter to improve deer welfare and make a positive contribution to the environmental value of the land.*

¹ WEAG is the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group – see <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/weag>.

Recommendation 11: Whole farm planting.

As a condition of public support, those (including Forest Enterprise Scotland) proposing to create woodlands on whole farms should be required to consider opportunities for integration with other land uses, for example by retaining better of grades of land in agricultural use, and by designing unplanted areas and fencing in ways that accommodate neighbouring farming systems, moorland management and environmental considerations.

3. In October 2013, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment announced that he was accepting all the WEAG recommendations. In relation to these two recommendations he said:

Recommendation 3

The Group's analysis and subsequent recommendation on types of land is helpful, because it signals clearly that there are opportunities to create a wide range of woodland types in Scotland. To provide an objective basis for decision-making by FCS Conservators, and others responsible for considering proposals that relate to woodland creation on agricultural land, FCS will work with Scottish Government and SNH to develop practical guidance. This guidance will be based upon the first three bullet points in this recommendation, and the issues that need to be considered when assessing proposals for 'whole farm planting' (as described in recommendation 11).

Recommendation 11

FCS and Scottish Government will develop a practical approach to implementing this recommendation as part of the guidance produced in relation to agricultural land. For more details, see recommendation 3.

4. Accordingly, this guidance is intended to help FCS Conservancy staff (and others responsible for considering proposals that relate to woodland creation on agricultural land) implement the first three bullets in recommendation 3 and recommendation 11. (Separate guidance is being produced about opportunities for woodland creation in protected places and in the upland red deer range, based on the fourth and sixth bullet points in recommendation 3.)

What should FCS Conservancies do?

5. FCS Conservancies have a key role to play in helping the Scottish Government achieve its target of planting 100,000 hectares of new woodland over the next ten years, in ways that integrate with other land uses.

6. Conservancy staff should now take the following measures when considering 'larger or more sensitive' (as defined in paragraph 9, below) woodland creation proposals on farmland:

- advise applicants to inform those managing neighbouring land (i.e. contiguous with the proposed planting) of their intentions, as part of the scoping process while

developing their proposals, and to inform Conservancy staff of any issues arising from this liaison;

- ask the applicant for the addresses of those managing this neighbouring land so that they can be told about the proposal when it is placed on the public register, as part of the normal consultation process;
- in cases of whole farm planting, ask the applicant to explain how they have considered opportunities for integration with other land uses, in accordance with WEAG recommendation 11 (for example by retaining better of grades of land in agricultural use, and by designing unplanted areas and fencing in ways that accommodate neighbouring farming systems, moorland management and environmental considerations);
- notify the local RPID office of the proposal, requesting advice on whether it is likely to have a serious adverse impact on local patterns of agriculture, taking into account previous farming practice on the land. Such advice will be made available to applicants.

7. Conservancy staff should use this information to help assess the woodland creation proposals against the first three bullets in recommendation 3 and recommendation 11.

8. For the avoidance of doubt, it should be noted that all woodland creation proposals (including those covered by this guidance) will continue to be considered by FCS Conservators in accordance with standard consultation procedures and to ensure compliance with the UK Forestry Standard and associated Environmental Guidelines².

How are 'larger or more sensitive proposals' defined?

9. In considering which are the 'larger or more sensitive proposals' (requiring the actions set out in paragraphs 6 and 7, above), Conservancy staff should take account of the following:

- Relevant guidance in Forest and Woodland Strategies (or equivalent documents) produced by local authorities, and the impact of significant increases in woodland since the Strategy was published;
- Local agricultural context. Woodland creation proposals are potentially sensitive on land with relatively high agricultural value compared with other land in the area, such as in-bye land where most other land in the area is rough grazing, or arable land in Severely Disadvantaged Less Favoured Areas.

In the absence of more precise local information, the table below provides a guide to size of woodland creation proposal which is likely to be large enough to be considered as 'large or more sensitive':

² <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-8BVECX>

Land Capability for Agriculture ³ /land use	Indicative threshold for the unit/holding
1-4: Arable and mixed use land	More than 10% of that land type
5.1-5.3 Improved grassland	50 hectares
5.1-6.2 Rough/unimproved/reverted grazing	100 hectares

10. However, even where the above criteria apply, Conservancy staff need not treat proposals as being 'larger or more sensitive' where:

- the proposed woodland is being created to benefit or rationalise an ongoing farm business;
- the land to be planted is covered by gorse or monoculture bracken, or otherwise ineligible for Single Farm payment (or any successor scheme), with less than 50% usable grazing;
- the proposed planting consists of small-scale shelterbelts, copses, habitat corridors and riparian woodlands added to farms to improve the farm environment or reduce the impact of diffuse pollution and flooding, or to improve or restore salmon fishing or stocks;
- the land is around towns and is zoned for development in the local development plan.

**Forestry Commission Scotland
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³ http://www.macaulay.ac.uk/explorescotland/lca_leaflet.pdf