

Future support for forestry in Scotland

The complexities of the Scotland Rural Development Programme militate strongly against small scale applicants. The new scheme should be simplified, placing more emphasis on local priorities and diversity, and a more appropriate scale of forestry, from woodland creation through to diversified local processing.

Summary

Revision to grant support is essential if we are to start to develop a robust and diverse forest resource which is capable of delivering a wide range of public benefits. Some ideas are developed below, but other themes are laid out in associated FPG briefing notes.

Forestry remains the “poor cousin” of land use in Scotland. Scottish Government should recognise that the sector has a clearer understanding of the requirement to deliver public benefits for public money and generally more effective systems than the richer relations.

Much of the groundwork for the new grant scheme has apparently already been completed; however the FC’s Customer Representative Group has not met since January. Consultation with the wider sector has been very limited in comparison to process for drawing up the existing grant scheme.

New planting

- Grants should not exceed costs, a danger with larger schemes.
- Grant should be structured to reflect high unit cost of small schemes and Grant should be tailored to make planting more attractive to a wider range of stakeholders and occupiers as outlined in the FPG “Forest ownership” brief.
- Bureaucracy needs to be considerably improved, especially for small schemes, however Scottish Government also needs to ensure that local community views, and environmental and cultural constraints are recognised and respected.
- Government should revisit the scope to allow conservation grazing in established new woodlands which have received payments for agricultural income forgone (eg FWS).
- A pro rata stocking density payment should be available for natural regeneration schemes and agro-forestry schemes.
- Grants to plant higher value conifers and broadleaves for timber have failed to deliver. Outreach and more tailored support measures are required to address this.

Management of existing woodlands and plantations

- Restructuring payments should take into account timber income generated (with higher timber prices, restructuring incentives are less important and potentially surplus).
- Support for Alternatives To Clearfell should be increased, and promoted
- Restoration of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites should be a clear priority, with no grant support for replanting with heavy shade bearing species.
- Agro-forestry should be encouraged.
- High Nature Value Forests should largely be Ancient Semi Natural Woodland and management given appropriate support.

- Diversification of species choice outlined in FPG’s “Restocking of Plantations” Brief will not be achieved unless a more stringent approach to deer control is adopted (as per the FPG “Deer” Briefing).
- The role of impartial woodland advisors in encouraging appropriate management needs to be recognised and supported.

Rural Development

- The “Hardwood Development” brief argues the case for supporting small sawmills.
- Rural development will benefit from more active, smaller scale land ownership, and from developments such as forest crofts, affordable wood housing and hutting.
- FPG supports recent developments in co-operative approaches to woodfuel supply.
- Forestry for People grants are a valuable means of supporting the engagement of communities and of delivering public benefits from woodlands. However differential and discriminatory evidence systems (actual versus standard costs) work as a considerable additional barrier to entry for community landholders.