

Countryside Stewardship Review and Update 2016

Countryside Stewardship (CS) was launched in 2015, and replaces both Environmental Stewardship and the English Woodland Grant Scheme. The overriding objectives of this scheme are water quality, flood management and biodiversity, and you'll find these themes running consistently through all the grant types.

As an applicant you'll quickly realise that everything you need is online, but don't be surprised at the frustration of finding all the relevant information quickly. The key is to read the relevant sections of the CS Manual and application documents which are held [here](#), or to get in contact with our [Forestry department](#). We'll be happy to advise you. The PDF versions of the CS manuals are excellent as you can search for keywords, but we appreciate a conversation can be much easier.

Note: some key application documents are withdrawn outside of the application window, but you can still find out the basics by referring to the manuals.

To keep up-to-date with CS and the application windows for woodland related grants, we would recommend you sign up to receive the Forestry Commissions email alerts. These are very helpful, and you can register for them [here](#).

The Grants

There are two tiers of support under which the woodland grants fall. Higher Tier and Other Capital. You don't really need to worry about these tiers, but there are some things which define the grants offered under them. There is a Middle Tier, but there are no woodland grants offered under this.

Higher Tier	Other Capital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive • Scored Applications • Targeted • Set Application Windows • Require an FC Approved Management Plan* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Competitive • Open Application Windows • No Requirement for an FC Approved Management Plan
Woodland Improvement Multi-Annual	Woodland Management Plans
Woodland Improvement (Capital)	Tree Health (Improvement & Restoration)
Woodland Improvement (infrastructure)	Woodland Creation Establishment*
Woodland Creation*	

*The Woodland Creation grant only needs a basic plan completed outlining the planting design, purpose and maintenance proposals as part of the application. As the Woodland Creation Establishment grant goes hand in hand with the Woodland Creation grant – it's not entirely true to say it doesn't need a plan to access it!

Woodland Management Plans

This grant remains very similar to the previous EWGS support for this work. It is an excellent grant for the woodland owner, regardless of whether you are looking for additional funding for management as a result, or simply wishing to formalise your thoughts. The approval process with your local Woodland Officer gives an opportunity for good discussion.

The grant is supported with free templates available online to download for use in preparation. The purpose of the plan is to help owners identify their own objectives for their woodland, and align these with specific works needed over the following 10-20 years. An approved plan will need to meet the [UK Forestry Standard](#), and will receive a 10 year felling licence to support any required felling, thinning and coppicing works.

It is worth repeating – an FC approved management plan is essential for all Higher Tier applications, with the exception of woodland creation.

Woodland Management Plan

Non Competitive

Open Application Window

Threshold	Payment
First 100 hectares (ha)	£20 per ha (minimum payment £1000)
Over 100ha	£10 per ha

Contd.

Woodland Tree Health – Restoration

Whereas in previous grant schemes, support was available for the restocking of most woodland types, this grant is now only available where Ash Dieback or Phytophthora ramorum is confirmed. The restocking grants are not insubstantial, and are costed-up to set thresholds dependant on the density of planting and the type of protection the plants require. It is not a fixed payment per hectare.

Woodland Tree Health - Restoration

Non Competitive

Open Application Window

Restock tree species	Ancient woodland site	Other
Native	£3,500	£2,750
Non-native	£1,750	£2,250

Areas of woodland affected by Chalara fraxinea or Phytophthora ramorum.

Must have a letter from FC or AHPA to confirm cases of Chalara .

Must have a SPHN confirming larch infected with Phytophthora ramorum infected larch

Minimum restock area of 0.5 hectares

Minimum density of 400 stems/ha

Payment based on a per tree and protection requirement basis.

Contd.

Woodland Tree Health - Improvement

In support of the Woodland Tree Health Restoration Grant, this aims to support the site clearance of locations affected by Phytophthora ramorum, both in clearing of diseased Larch and Rhododendron from affected sites, but also Rhododendron found within a 3km radius of Phytophthora affected site.

Woodland Tree Health - Improvement

Non Competitive

Open Application Window

£2800 - £4400/ha for Rhododendron control

£260 - £1680/ha for Larch tree removal

Supports removal of Rhododendron and/or (Uneconomic) Young Larch trees in response to a SPHN

Rhododendron Control requires a SPHN on ability to prove you are within 3km of a SPHN

Woodland Improvement - Multi Annual

The EWGS equivalent to this grant was the Woodland Management Grant which offered £30 per hectare for agreed work in targeted locations. This is much more generous in offering £100 per hectare per year, but it is now both competitive and targeted. Within Lowland England, these targets are for restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS), management of priority habitats (native and ancient woodland types), and to support priority woodland species, including woodland birds. You'll want to be familiar with your [Landscape Character Area and its priorities](#) if you choose the latter option.

The works supported are straightforward, and will be drawn from your management plan – thinning, coppicing and scrub management for which set targets will be set. On top of this however, you will also be required to consider other areas of work identified in your management plan, and act accordingly. This includes the threat from deer and grey squirrels, the necessary treatment of rides and opens ground, veteran trees which need to be released from competing vegetation, and the availability of deadwood. It becomes clear quite quickly that some woodland holdings will have much more demanded of them than others should their application be successful. Records of works need to be kept, alongside the monitoring of changes - such as annual deer impact assessments.

This is a generous grant, but not one to be considered lightly.

Woodland Improvement – Capital

The EWGS equivalent was the Woodland Improvement Grant, which offered varying rates of support from 50-80% of standard costs for works and items. The grant today offers the full standard rate for successful applications, but the two major changes: - the scheme is now competitive, and there is a fraction of the work types it will now support.

Applications can be submitted on their own, or with a Woodland Improvement Multi-Annual Application. Dependant on this, the range of items you can apply for does vary.

Woodland Improvement – Infrastructure

The EWGS equivalent to this was the Woodfuel Woodland Improvement Grant, offering support for woodland access and track works to a level of 60% of agreed costs. Today, the grant offers a 40% level of support, and is now competitive. The grant is to support access works including hard standings, haulage roads, turning areas, culverts and forwarder tracks.

Before applying for this grant it is important to have your background work in hand. Specifically, you will need to ensure you have a detailed specification for the works, three quotations, and notified the Local Planning Authority. It is worth noting that the grant may cover aspects of this preparation work for successful schemes, and so it is worth recording accurately time involved by all parties in securing these items.

Woodland Creation

Whilst previous versions of woodland creation grants have been targeted and point scored, this scheme is different in that there are higher minimum planting thresholds, and there is no flat rate for schemes. The grant offered to successful applicants is based on a per tree and protection basis, and so offers greater incentive for planting at higher densities. It is not a fixed payment per hectare.

Successful applicants will receive a payment of £1.28 per tree and standard costs for tree guards, stock and deer fencing. The result of this is that the grant can cover between 75 and 80% of costs in the right circumstances.

The scheme is targeted at flood prevention, water quality, as well as buffering and connecting woodlands. Applications tackling the water issues can be a minimum of 1 hectare in size, whereas the others must be a minimum of 3 hectares in size.

Woodland Creation

Competitive	February to end of April	
Minimum agreement size	3ha	1ha
Minimum block size	0.5ha	0.1ha
Minimum width	20m	10m
Minimum stocking density	400 stems per ha (sph)	1,600sph
Maximum internal open space	20%	20%

Additional support for the planting comes by means of the Woodland Creation Maintenance Payment. This is a sum of £200 per hectare, towards the upkeep of the site, including repairs, replacement planting and weeding – and quite importantly, the removal of tree guards by year 10. This option extends the contract from 5 to 10 years, and requires additional reporting back to Natural England as evidence of management.

Some general observations

- Do be aware that you will need to supply more RPA Customer information than seen in previous grant schemes. This includes your Single Business Identifier, Customer Reference Number, VAT details (if relevant), as well as making sure the land on which you're applying is already registered on the Rural Land Registry (RLR).
- For all these applications, you'll want to access the [Forestry Commissions Advanced Land Information Search](#) to look at how the targeting is undertaken. Presently you can only access this using Internet Explorer 10, but have a read of the instructions on the FC website.
- Do be aware that the stated application window can be misleading. Higher Tier Grants open on the stated date, but close up to 30 days earlier. The purpose of this is to give

Woodland Officers a chance to undertake site visits, and ensure applications are fully complete before their final submission at the end of the application window. To keep up-to-date with CS and the application windows for woodland related grants, we would recommend you sign up to receive the Forestry Commissions email alerts. These are very helpful, and you can register for them [here](#).

- Be aware of the reporting obligations – particularly for Woodland Creation and Woodland Improvement Multi Annual Agreements. This also includes keeping records of activity in woodland areas where you are receiving grant, as well as invoices, receipts, consents and permissions.

- Do take careful note of the detailed specifications and timescales before signing.

- And finally, there are of course other grants related to parklands, wood pasture, veteran trees in open areas, orchards and hedgerows. These would be submitted as part of a farm or joint farm and woodland application, but are not covered under the woodland grants.