



COETIROEDD
GWELL
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BETTER
WOODLANDS
FOR WALES

Grantiau a chymorth
i greu a gwella coetiroedd

Grants and support for creating
and improving woodlands

Approach to Continuous Cover Forestry

Introduction

Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) systems have long been used in Europe and by some woodland owners in Wales who find that even-aged woodlands and clear-felling do not suit their objectives.

The Wales Woodland Strategy encourages a greater use of continuous cover systems as a method of providing more benefits to owners and the public. These benefits include:

- Less visual impact than clearfelling
- Increased structural and species diversity within stands
- Potential benefits for wildlife and less sudden disturbance of the forest ecosystem
- Less disturbance of forest ecosystem and greater shelter for regenerating seedlings
- Reduced restocking costs (assuming natural regeneration is successful)
- Production of high quality timber with more flexibility and scope to optimise tree size to suit markets
- Structural diversity provides resilience against windthrow (at the stand level)

The UK Forest Standard and the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS standard) also favour a move towards the use of lower impact silvicultural systems (including CCF).

The Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) scheme therefore encourages greater use of CCF on suitable sites. However, this is not mandatory, as continuous cover management is not a prescription that can be applied to all woodlands. It may not suit some owners' objectives and it may not be possible or practical to convert many even aged stands to CCF in the current rotation. Particular silvicultural skills are needed in order to evaluate the scope to transform even aged stands to CCF systems and in order to thin stands in ways that lead to the development of an uneven aged structure.

The purpose of this document is to provide Management Planners, owners and FC Wales staff with an overview of how the BWW scheme supports the use of CCF systems of management.

Definitions

CCF encompasses a whole range of different silvicultural systems (shelterwood, group felling, selection systems), whereby the forest canopy is maintained at one or more levels without clearfelling.

Clearfelling is defined as the felling of all trees on an area greater than 0.25ha.

BWW Approach to CCF

BWW encourages the use of CCF management systems but recognises that there are many woodlands where this is not appropriate.

An assessment process has been developed as a basis for evaluating the scope to transform plantations to CCF. The assessment is designed for conifer plantations and some non-native broadleaf plantations (at FCW's discretion). Many native woodlands are managed using CCF systems and this work will be supported through grant aid designed for native woodlands.

In plantations, grant rates for transforming woodlands to CCF are higher for sites that FCW considers to provide high levels of public benefit. These could include sites where clearfelling would cause landscape problems or where it would damage the recreational value of important sites.

On sites receiving CCF grants, individual felling areas must not exceed 0.25 hectares and proposals must be deemed feasible by the FCW. Restocking can be by natural regeneration or planting.

Planning Process

BWW provides an effective planning process for evaluating and monitoring CCF. Where a woodland owner is considering taking a CCF approach to the management of more than 5 hectares, a CCF assessment is needed in order to evaluate the scope of transformation. The 5 hectares can be made up of more than one block. There is funding available for assessments and BWW will provide grant-aid for work associated with CCF where the assessment shows that a site is suitable and fits with BWW priorities¹. There is an enhanced package of grants for sites that provide the greatest public benefits². Other sites, which are not identified as high priority by the assessment, will still be eligible for grants to support CCF at standard rather than enhanced rates. This support is aimed at encouraging active management using an appropriate CCF silvicultural system in line with best practice techniques³.

The Woodland Officer and Management Planner will agree the need for a CCF assessment prior to approval of the Foundation Plan. To allow this to happen the Planner must have undertaken the stability scoring part of the assessment and attach the results to the Foundation Plan. Any areas having a stability score of seven or greater will not be eligible for a CCF assessment and FCW will not make grant payments for the assessment of these areas. Where exclusion of areas (due to stability scoring) causes the total area of woodland eligible for an assessment to fall below the five hectare threshold, FCW will not agree to an assessment and will not make grant

¹ Suitable sites are those which the CCF assessment identifies as 'stable' or 'very stable'.

² The CCF assessment identifies these sites.

³ FC Information Note 40 'Transforming Even-aged Conifer Stands to Continuous Cover Management' and FC Information Note 45 'Monitoring the Transformation of Even-aged Stands to Continuous Cover Management'.

payments for assessment regardless of the original area assessed for stability. There are no grant payments for undertaking the stability scoring part of the assessment.

A woodland owner can choose to take a CCF approach to the management of woodlands less than 5 hectares in area but these areas will not require a CCF assessment. The standard range of BWW grants can be used by owners to practice CCF in woodlands without a CCF assessment. However, small areas will be eligible for CCF transformation grants if the Management Planner clearly explains the transformation approach within the Management Plan. The higher grant rate may be available in some circumstances, subject to agreement with the Woodland Officer.

Where an owner is considering CCF on a Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS), and the site is eligible for both a CCF and PAWS assessment, a PAWS assessment must be completed first. The Woodland Officer and Management Planner will then determine the need for a CCF assessment based on the PAWS assessment result.

Once the stands have been assessed, the owner needs to decide which (if any) sites will be transformed to CCF. The plan should express what type of stand structure is desired in these areas, and the management needed to achieve and maintain this. This scheme will support 5 yearly monitoring of these stands in order to record the development of the stand. Monitoring should include the information set out in FC Information Note 45 'Monitoring the Transformation of Even-aged Stands to Continuous Cover Management'.

BWW Grants for CCF

Woodland Improvement Grants (WIGs) are the main type of grant available under BWW to support a range of operations that may be needed for transformation to CCF, including:

- All work to control threats, including fencing
- Operations to improve infrastructure, including track construction
- Uneconomic thinning
- Control of invasive plants
- Work to secure natural regeneration (Note: no fixed payment is available)
- Monitoring the development of CCF stands

Additionally, CCF sites are eligible for other Woodland Improvement Grants aimed at all woodlands.

In areas of CCF where change of species is required or where natural regeneration has failed, the BWW scheme provides replanting grants.

In new planting sites or on clearfelled areas, BWW provides higher grant rates for the establishment of mixtures that include at least 25% broadleaved species. These mixtures are considered to have higher environmental value and provide more scope for transformation to uneven aged silvicultural systems.

Further Information

UK Forest Standard
BWW Grant Structure
BWW A Guide for Woodland Owners
UKWAS standard
BWW Approach to Native Woodlands
BWW Approach to PAWS