



Grantiau a chymorth
i greu a gwella coetiroedd

Grants and support for creating
and improving woodlands

Approach to Environmental Issues

Introduction

Woodlands are among the most valuable habitats we have in Wales and they support a rich variety of wildlife. 'A diverse and healthy environment' is one of the key themes of the Wales Woodland Strategy, which recognises the importance of conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of our woodlands. Woodlands also have a significant influence on environmental quality, particularly soil and water, and while this influence is generally beneficial, woodlands must be managed to avoid any negative impacts.

Most owners appreciate the environmental importance of their woodlands but are often concerned about the cost of managing environmental aspects and about the impact on other management, particularly commercial operations.

The purpose of this document is to provide woodland owners, Management Planners, and Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) staff with an overview of the way in which Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) takes environmental issues into account. It does not cover social considerations such as archaeology, landscape or recreation which are covered in other 'Approach to' documents.

Definitions

The **UK Biodiversity Action Plan** (UKBAP) describes the UK's biological resources and includes detailed Species Action Plans, Habitat Action Plans and Local Biodiversity Action Plans which provide detail and actions for the protection of biological resources.

Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) are sites where records show continuous woodland cover since 1600 but where the native woodland has been replaced with plantations usually of non-native trees. Nevertheless these sites often retain some of the important characteristics of native woodland.



The term **feature** is used within BWW Management Plans to describe an area of woodland that will be treated as one unit in order to meet management objectives. **Factor** is a term used to describe things that affect features.

BWW Approach to Environmental Issues

FCW wants to encourage owners to manage their woodlands in an environmentally responsible way so that important features are protected. It is a requirement of BWW that woodlands be managed in accordance with the principles and guidelines set out in the UK Forest Standard (UKFS) and supporting Guideline publications. Compliance with specific elements of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS standard) is also a requirement, including:

- Protection of rare species and habitats
- Maintenance of biodiversity and ecological functions
- Conservation of semi-natural woodlands & PAWS
- Responsible management of game

BWW will support all owners in protecting and maintaining woodland habitats and key species. In certain circumstances BWW may also support owners to manage other habitats that occur within the woodland boundary e.g. marsh, bog etc, or those which are closely associated with the woodland.

It will be the owner's responsibility to manage operations, such as harvesting or the creation of tracks, in a way that does not threaten the environment.

FCW has a statutory duty to protect woodlands and therefore there is a presumption that all existing woodland will remain as woodland. However, there may be situations where woodlands have been created to the detriment to other important habitats, or archaeological features, which would benefit from the removal of tree cover. In these circumstances BWW may support removal of tree cover where a Specialist Assessment of the impacts demonstrates that this is the best option.

Planning Process

When the Management Planner makes a BWW application on behalf of a woodland owner FCW will identify any site designations (e.g. Site of Special Scientific Interest or Scheduled Ancient Monument) as well as those relating to water (e.g. Acid Sensitive Area or Critical Load Catchments). FCW may also gather some additional relevant information from partners, (see Further Information – A Guide to Information Sharing and Consultation within Better Woodlands for Wales). This information will be supplied to the Planner so that they can take account of it when preparing the Foundation Plan. The Foundation Plan will include information on:

- Important habitats or species associated with the woodland
- Any threats to these species, habitats or the woodland
- Other important issues such as water

In certain circumstances FCW will grant aid an Ecological Specialist Assessment as part of the plan preparation grant in order to evaluate particular environmental issues (see Further Information). The Planner and Woodland Officer will agree on the need for an assessment, taking a risk based approach and considering such issues as proximity to environmentally sensitive sites, the likely presence of



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protected species, woodland size and management history. The Ecological Assessment format has been developed to identify and record:

- The type and location of important habitat or species
- Any threats to habitats and species and their management needs
- The condition of native woodlands
- Recommendations for future management

Information from any Specialist Assessments will be incorporated into the Management Plan. The plan must incorporate all the important environmental issues in the Objectives by treating them as Features, Factors or Desired Characteristics and defining the monitoring needed in order to determine whether management is succeeding. No Specialist Assessment has yet been developed for considering water issues but these, where appropriate, may be treated as an important Factor in the management of the woodland and would therefore be reflected in the Objectives and in the Operations proposed in the plan.

BWW Grants for Environmental Issues

In addition to grant aid for the Management Plan and Specialist Assessments mentioned above, BWW provides a wide range of grants for operations designed to benefit the woodland environment. Restocking and new planting grants are designed to provide an incentive for owners to create new native or mixed woodlands. Woodland Improvement Grants (WIG) support a wide range of operations to protect woodlands and enhance environmental values, for example:

- Fencing, grey squirrel control and infrastructure for deer management
- Control of invasive, exotic plants*
- Thinning**

* There is an enhanced rate of 75% grant for the most ecologically important sites.

** Grants up to 75% for restoring high priority PAWS.

50% WIGs are available for other work needed to bring woodlands up to current environmental standards or contribute to the delivery of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. This could include BAP species conservation work, riparian zone management or undertaking work needed to comply with the 4th edition of the FC Soil and Water Guidelines.

Further Information

UK Forest Standard

FC Soil and Water Guidelines

BWW Grant Structure

BWW Guide for Woodland Owners

UKWAS standard

BWW Approach to Native Woodland

BWW Approach to PAWS

A Guide to Information Sharing and Consultation within Better Woodlands for Wales



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