



# Approach to Management Planning

## Introduction

Woodlands can provide many benefits, from producing valuable timber to providing important habitats for wildlife or enjoyable places for people to visit. To provide these benefits woodlands must be managed effectively. Many woodland owners have long understood the importance of good management in order to achieve their objectives. However, it is now becoming more important for owners to demonstrate that their woodlands are managed effectively and responsibly in order to market their timber. This is because the timber industry is increasingly looking to buy timber from woodlands that have been certified as being managed in a sustainable way. To secure certification, owners must comply with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS).

Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) is the new Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) grant scheme for creating and improving woodlands. BWW is designed to fulfil many of the requirements of UKWAS by basing grant aid on a sound Management Plan. BWW is more than a grant scheme; it is a framework for support that will help owners meet the challenges associated with woodland management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Management Plan identifies the owner's objectives and those related to best practice identified by the UK Forest Standard and UKWAS. The Plan looks at the current condition of the woodlands, creates a vision for how the owner wants the woodlands to be and finally identifies how woodlands will be taken from the current state to the one desired in the vision. This last part is expressed in the Plan of Operations which identifies the operations needed to manage the woodlands and any grant aid.

The purpose of this document is to give Management Planners, owners and FCW staff with an overview of the BWW approach to management planning. The document also outlines business rules relating to the preparation of Plans.

## Definitions

The **UK Forest Standard** (UKFS) outlines the government's approach to sustainable forestry.



# Approach to Management Planning

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The **UK Woodland Assurance Standard** (UKWAS) is an independent certification standard for verifying sustainable forest and woodland management in the United Kingdom. Woodland owners can achieve certification for their woodlands if they gain independent verification that they are complying with the standard.

**Grants & Licences Online** (G&L Online) is the Forestry Commission computer system that supports Better Woodlands for Wales. Management Planners and Applicants access the system online.

## BWW Approach to Management Planning

### Preparing Plans, roles and responsibilities

A BWW Applicant must be the legal owner of the woodland area for which the application is being made, or have a legal status that gives them rights similar to an owner including the right to implement the Management Plan and the work in the Plan of Operations. So a BWW Applicant can be an individual owner or a group (where there is joint ownership), a tenant (where the tenant has rights to manage the woodland), an organisation or business. The Applicant must be the payee for all grants although they can give authority to administer the Management Plan and claim grants to an Agent. In these cases, FCW need a letter from the Applicant authorising the Agent to act on their behalf.

The BWW Management Plan must be prepared by one of the Management Planners trained and approved by FCW to undertake the work. All Plans must be prepared using the FCW formats incorporated in to the FC Grants and Licences Online computer system (G&L Online). Grant aid is available from FCW towards the cost of preparing the Plan. In certain circumstances a Specialist Assessment may be required in addition to the basic Plan. Details of when these are required are provided in a series of 'Approach to' documents published by FCW but a summary is given in Appendix 1. All Specialist Assessments must be done by approved Specialists.

Although the woodland owner does not prepare the Plan, they do need to provide the Planner with information about their woodlands.

Each Management Plan is assigned to a Woodland Officer (WO) and Technical Services Officer (TSO). This is normally done on a geographical basis although at times where some WO have a high caseload, cases may be passed to other WO outside their normal geographical range. The WO is responsible, on behalf of FCW, for cases assigned to them. They should be **the first/key point of contact for questions and queries** although generally will deal with silvicultural, management planning and grant aid issues themselves and pass mapping queries on to the TSO, who is responsible for the mapping and recording elements of the system. The relevant WO and TSO are named in the case details in G&L Online.

# Approach to Management Planning

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The FCW Operations Manager approves all Management Plans. This approval occurs at the end of the management planning process and Applicants should not assume that the Management Plan, and operations in it, will be approved despite being assessed and approved in principle by the WO.

Codes of Practice have been produced for Planners, Specialists, FCW and Applicants.

Where an owner is considering entering BWW but contacts FCW for advice, the normal procedure will be to point the owner in the direction of the available literature (in particular the owners guide), and ask them to approach a Planner when ready. The WO may still need to undertake site visits but these would not normally be offered initially until other options had been tried.

## Thresholds & Rules

There must only be one BWW application per property and that application must include all the woodlands on the property<sup>1</sup>. WOs may allow large woodland holdings (greater than 200 hectares) which have distinct and separate woodland areas to be split into more than one Plan where the Planner can demonstrate that this will aid management or where the size or nature of the Plan would make it difficult to prepare a single Plan<sup>2</sup>. Where an owner has multiple properties, whether these are woodlands, a farm or estate, they can submit one application per property. However, a number of small woodlands (less than 10 hectares each) under the same ownership, which are within the same local authority area, should be included in a single application. If the Planner feels that it is not sensible to include a number of small woodlands in one Plan then they should speak to the WO before submitting an application. The WO has discretion to negotiate in these

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of BWW, FCW will not insist on areas less than 0.1 hectares or narrower than 12 metres being included in the Management Plan (areas less than 0.1 hectares cannot be mapped within the G&L Online system although they can be identified as a point on the map). If the Planner is particularly keen to include areas below these thresholds, perhaps because they have particular environmental or social value, then they will need to make the case to the Woodland Officer **before** submitting the application. FCW will map all areas of woodland shown on the application map but does not guarantee funding for areas below the thresholds unless they have been agreed with the Woodland Officer. Similarly, if the Planner wants to exclude areas of woodland from the Plan that are above the threshold then they need to make the case to the Woodland Officer **before** submitting an application. In this way the Planner and Woodland Officer can agree what is and isn't woodland and the application is then correct when it is submitted.

<sup>2</sup> For example, geographically separate blocks which may be managed differently and separately e.g. an area of commercial upland forestry managed by a forestry agent which is distinct from the woodlands on the traditional estate which are managed primarily for sporting use.

# Approach to Management Planning

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circumstances. Where woodland has been split and sold to multiple owners, FCW may refuse a BWW application for part of the woodland and insist that all applications be made for all parts of the property at the same time. This will be at the discretion of the WO. Where this occurs, FCW will insist on a single Planner taking the lead and preparing Plans for the different parts of the property at the same time. The WO also has discretion to negotiate the Plan Preparation fees in this situation and insist that the base fee be reduced to reflect the reduced work in preparing a number of Plans on the same woodland simultaneously. The Planner and WO will ensure that the Plans are consistent and that there are no conflicts. In extreme circumstances the WO may insist on one Plan to cover all parts of a woodland regardless of ownership. This may happen where the WO feels different parts of a woodland under different ownership cannot be sensibly managed separately under different Plans.

The minimum threshold for a BWW Plan is 0.25 hectares. Applications for areas less than this will not be accepted. There is no upper limit.

## Charter

FCW has Charter times for the approval of Plans. FCW will try and complete their parts of the Plan within 11 weeks. This includes:

- 1 week for initial approval and digitisation of a complete application. An application will only be considered complete where FCW are in possession of a valid map showing woodland boundaries and correctly completed online application forms.
- 2 weeks for subsequent digitisation (compartments and operations). This is on receipt of a valid paper map showing **all** the compartments and operations. Where digital maps are provided the aim is for accurate maps to be uploaded within 1 week of receipt. FCW will not digitise paper maps until the Foundation Plan has been approved.
- 2 weeks for Foundation Plan Approval.
- 6 weeks for Management Plan Approval.

Citizens Charter reports will be published on a quarterly basis and the overall aim is for the FCW to complete the above targets in 90% of cases.

## Plan approval

When Plans are submitted to FCW for approval, the WO will assess the overall quality and standard of the Plan and the way in which it was prepared and record comments against the Plan. FCW will provide feedback to Planners on the way in which the Plan was prepared. Details of how Plans are assessed and feedback given can be found in the FCW document 'Approach to Assessing BWW Plans & Giving Feedback'. The WO may decline the Plan if they feel it does not meet the scheme standards and return it to the Planner for changes to be made. Once the WO is content that the Plan meets the

# Approach to Management Planning

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scheme standards they will pass it for approval to the Operations Manager, who then assesses the scheme and has the option to approve or decline. Once approved by the Operations Manager the Applicant also needs to approve or decline the Plan. Details of the approval process can be found in 'How to manage your BWW contract'.

The Plan of Operations, which is part of the Management Plan, lists all the work that is to be undertaken within the woodland within a five-year period following approval. This includes operations that are grant aided and those that are not. Some operations will be categorised as 'Essential Operations' by FCW. These are operations that must be completed on time if the Plan is to remain valid. Failure to complete these operations will result in access to grant aid for other operations being withdrawn. Grant aid cannot be moved from essential operations to non-essential ones.

Once the Plan is approved the claim lines relating to work identified in the Plan of Operations will become live. Applicants must manage the Plan of Operations and ensure that grant claims are made on time within the claim year specified. Planners need to make Applicants aware that FCW grants are offered on a 'use it or lose it' basis, i.e. failure to claim grants within the specified year without seeking an amendment may result in the grant offer being withdrawn.

After five years i.e. when the Plan of Operations ends, the Applicant will have the option of renewing the Plan for another five-year period. A Management Planner must do the renewal.

New owners of woodland that has an existing BWW Management Plan (and who want the woodland to remain in BWW) must either adopt the existing Plan or engage a Management Planner to review the Plan at their own expense. FCW will only pay for a review at the five-year breakpoint.

## Felling Licences & BWW

There are four key areas where BWW Management Plans interact with Felling Licences:

Licences within BWW: A Felling Licence will be issued automatically for all felling within the first 5-year BWW Plan period once the BWW Plan has been approved. FCW will expect all amendments to felling to be approved through the BWW process and will not issue standalone Licences for areas covered by approved BWW Plans. After the initial 5-years the Plan can be approved again for another 5-year period without the need for consultation so long as there are no major changes to the felling and restocking proposed in the original Plan. To allow this to happen the BWW Plan must include a 20-year felling and restocking map and this must be consulted on when the Plan is first prepared. All felling within the first 5-year period will be digitised and made available for spatial linking. The 20-year felling and restocking maps will not be digitised but will be

# Approach to Management Planning

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scanned and attached to the BWW case. Smaller woodlands may not require a 20-year felling and restocking map. Woodland Officers (WO) have discretion to decide whether to request one or not.

Standalone Licences: Woodland owners can continue to apply for a Felling Licence separately without going through the BWW application process but there will be no grant aid for restocking or woodland management without a BWW Management Plan<sup>3</sup>. Owners choosing not to enter BWW will have to comply with any restocking conditions imposed by a Licence at their own expense. FCW will try to ensure that the standards applied to standalone Felling Licences are no less than those that would be expected if the felling was done within BWW. Therefore, although FCW would prefer that felling was done as part of a BWW Management Plan, felling under Licence but without a Plan will not prejudice an Applicant should they wish to bring their woodlands into BWW later.

BWW & properties already covered by a Licence: BWW applications will be accepted for properties already covered by a Licence where FCW feels the Licence does not pre-empt decisions (fundamental to the principles and ethos of BWW) which should be made as part of the planning process. Where there is a perceived conflict the Applicant will be asked not to enact the Licence and wait for new felling permission to be given once the BWW Plan is approved. If the Applicant doesn't agree to this FCW will decline the BWW case at the earliest opportunity. FCW will not make payments for any work done until the Plan is approved by FCW and Planners will not be entitled to severance fees.

Licence applications made during the preparation of BWW Management Plans: Applicants can make standalone Felling Licence applications for land on which a BWW Plan is being prepared. However, FCW will ask that the Licence application be withdrawn if it appears to FCW that it pre-empts decisions (fundamental to the principles and ethos of BWW) which should be made as part of the planning process. If the application is not withdrawn the BWW case will be declined and archived (within G&L Online). The case can be reactivated at a later date. FCW will not make any payments for preparing the Plan until the Plan is approved by FCW. The Planner will not be entitled to severance fees. Even where FCW accepts that the Licence application does not conflict with BWW they will expect a 20-year felling and restocking map to be submitted as part of the Licence application. Standalone Licences will only be issued for 1-year to deal with an immediate need.

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<sup>3</sup> Forestry Commission Wales is currently investigating the options for funding very simple operations such as fencing in small woodlands. This may result in a 'first steps' scheme which provides low levels of grant aid without a Management Plan.

# Approach to Management Planning

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## Amendments

At times during the implementation of the Management Plan there may be need for an Applicant or their Agent to request an amendment to a Management Plan. Rules governing amendments and the process for requesting and making an amendment can be found in 'How to manage your BWW contract'.

Changes in operational specifications (between those that were used in the WIG Calculator to calculate the grant aid and those that actually occurred on site) resulting in cost variations which:

1. are not greater or less than 15% of the cost for the operation shown in the Plan of Operations, or;
  2. where the value of the change is not worth more than £500 of grant aid;
- will not be eligible for an amendment. However, the operation must be completed to the satisfaction of FCW and FCW reserves the right to insist on work being completed to the original specification (where FCW feel the work does not achieve the original intention in terms of the area or length it covers or the standard and specification of work).

## Certification

BWW has been designed to fulfil many of the requirements of UKWAS. Therefore owners who choose to go for certification should be able to use the Management Plan as the basis of their application.

# Approach to Management Planning

## Planning Process

The management planning process has six stages shown in the table below.

Stage and Timescale	Applicant's role	Planner's role	FCW's role
Stage 1: Initial Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose &amp; appoint Planner</li> <li>Brief Planner on general intentions for the woodland &amp; identify woodland boundaries on a map.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain requirements of BWW</li> <li>Obtain a map of the woodland</li> <li>Make the Initial Application to FCW for approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check, approve or decline the application</li> <li>Match application with the boundary map</li> <li>Digitise boundary map</li> </ul>
Stage 2: Foundation Plan preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide information to Planner</li> <li>Discuss objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtain information from owner</li> <li>Clarify the owner's objectives</li> <li>Write Foundation Plan and submit to owner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide constraints data &amp; IfES data</li> <li>Support Planner, provide guidance and attend a site visit if necessary</li> </ul>
Stage 3: Foundation Plan approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study Foundation Plan &amp; discuss with Planner</li> <li>Decide whether to proceed or not &amp; either (a) approve Foundation Plan &amp; agree contract with Planner to prepare full Management Plan or (b) withdraw</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss with owner &amp; either (a) if owner approves Foundation Plan, submit it to FCW for approval, or (b) if not, inform FCW and claim severance fee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Either (a) review and approve or decline the Foundation Plan.</li> <li>Or (b) pay severance fee.</li> </ul>
Stage 4: Management Plan preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify detailed objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtain Specialist Assessments if required</li> <li>Consult as required</li> <li>Write Plan and submit to owner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digitise map data</li> <li>Support Planner &amp; attend a site visit if necessary</li> </ul>
Stage 5: Management Plan approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss any issues and agree Management Plan</li> <li>Formally sign off Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit Management Plan to FCW for approval</li> <li>Amend as necessary</li> <li>Obtain copies of Management Plan and Plan of Operations Contract to give to owner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review &amp; either approve or decline the Management Plan</li> <li>Check operations &amp; specifications</li> <li>Produce the Management Plan and Plan of Operations contract</li> </ul>
Stage 6: Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement the Plan of Operations</li> <li>Claim grants</li> <li>After 5 years review &amp; update the Plan of Operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Planner is not involved after the Plan has been approved unless the owner retains their services to help implement the Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grant claim inspections</li> </ul>

# Approach to Management Planning

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A more detailed explanation of the process is given in 'A Guide for Woodland Owners' available on the FCW website ([www.forestry.gov.uk/wales](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/wales)) or from Customer Services (telephone 0845 604 0845). Information on how to prepare a Management Plan is provided in a series of 'How to' documents published by FCW.

## BWW Grants for Management Planning

Grant aid towards the cost of the Management Plan is provided by FCW. For full details, see document 'Management Plan Preparation Grant' available on the FCW website ([www.forestry.gov.uk/wales](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/wales)) or from Customer Services (telephone 0845 604 0845).

## Further Information

- UK Forest Standard
- BWW Grant Structure
- BWW A Guide for Woodland Owners
- UK Woodland Assurance Standard

# Approach to Management Planning

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## APPENDIX 1 - Thresholds for Specialist Assessments

Assessment	Threshold
Transformation of conifer plantations to Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF)	Properties over 5 hectares where the Applicant wants to transform conifer plantations to CCF
Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)	All properties with more than 3 ha of PAWS
Woodland Ecology	All properties with more than 10 ha of native woodland
Social	Properties where management needs to take account of significant social issues
Deer	Properties where there are significant deer management issues
Archaeology	Sites identified by the Archaeological Trusts