



G&R Information Note 15

BWW Case Prioritisation - September 2010

Background

The purpose of this information note is to provide Management Planners and applicants with an understanding of how G&R staff will be prioritising casework in order to meet the BWW closure deadlines published in Information Note 13 in July 2010. The aim is that by providing information about how we are working we can reduce the quantity of BWW cases which move back and forth between FCW and Management Planners and speed up the process from application to approval.

How overall work is prioritised

G&R use the following approach when prioritising all casework:

1. Regulatory Work, as the deadlines are set by the relevant legislation
 - Countryside Rights of Way Act closures
 - Alleged Illegal Felling investigations¹
 - Felling Licence Applications
 - Environmental Impact Assessments
2. Better Woodlands for Wales casework
3. Applications for Phytophthora support grants
4. Legacy work – Forest Plans & claims
5. Other – work related to approval of Forest Design Plans on the Assembly Government Woodland Estate

How BWW casework is prioritised

Priorities do change during the year. For example we receive over 60% of grant claims between January and March and staff will focus on inspection and payment of these to ensure payment before the end of year deadline.

From now to 31 December 2011 we will aim to move applications through the system by focusing on ensuring that cases reach the deadlines indicated below. For example this means that at September 2010 the Technical Services Team currently have map requests

¹ In locations where we have a high number of reports of alleged illegal felling we aim to use external resource to carry out the initial investigation and only use G&R staff if there is a confirmed case which requires action.

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as a high priority to enable applicants to come into the scheme. From 17 - 25 December woodland officers will focus on approving Foundation Plans.

Stage	Final date for submission of new applications	FRA Foundation plan received by FCW	MP Foundation plan signed by owner	MP Maps submitted for digitisation	MP (FCW) Maps ready for spatial linking	PRL1 Management Plan (required standard) submitted to FCW	DCT Management Plan approved by FCW	APR Management Plan signed by owner & with FCW
Date	17th Nov 2010	17th Dec 2010	31st Dec 2010	1st July 2011	1st Sept 2011	1st Oct 2011	10th Dec 2011	31st Dec 2011

The deadlines indicated above will be strictly adhered to and are based on applications being accurately completed and fully in accordance with the latest version of the BWW business rules. Our focus is to ensure that plans which are ‘right first time’ receive approval. Plans which have been returned to planners for correction or changes are not deemed to be ‘right first time’ will be at a high risk of not being approved.

Woodland officers deal with plans in the date order that they are received. If the plan is returned to the planner for errors or queries then it will go to the bottom of the list when it is re-submitted. The same principle is applied to maps which have been submitted to the Technical Services Team for digitising. Therefore we would urge planners to ensure that applications are clear and check that they are in accordance with the latest version of the BWW business rules prior to submission. Cases that are returned to planners will not receive priority treatment when they are re-submitted.

FCW accept no responsibility for a management planner’s workload and recommend that management planners should decline new applications when the case load begins to exceed a realistic workload for the timescale remaining. The management planner will not receive funding from FCW for work on applications that do not meet the above deadlines.

Changes to applications after submission

We find that some planners, and applicants, ask to change, or add to, case details several times after it has been first submitted, this is particularly with regard to mapping. Where a planner or applicant asks to make changes to an application after it has been submitted then it will be treated in the same way as above, i.e. the plan will be returned to the planner to make the changes and then go to the bottom of the list upon re-submission.

Timing of submission

We would strongly urge planners to submit proposals as soon as they are prepared rather than wait until the deadline. Funds are allocated to cases on a first come first served basis

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so those applications that are received early and do not require any changes are most likely to get the claim years that are requested.

Foundation Plan approval

To minimise delays at Foundation Plan stage, woodland officers will carry out the minimum of checks prior to approving these. This means that some errors may be missed at that stage but can be addressed later. It will still remain the planner's responsibility to ensure that all necessary issues (including BAP species and adjacent/buffer zone site designations such as SSSI's etc) have been taken into account including completion of any stakeholder engagement and consultation prior to submission of the management plan.

How to get it right first time

We are keen to help planners to get applications 'right first time' and this section includes some information to help planners with that and to speed up progress. In many cases issues can be resolved by checking the latest version of the business rules and checking that all parts of the application have been correctly completed prior to submission. The list below provides advice but is not exhaustive.

1. Keep plans simple and do not include operations which have been challenged in similar situations. It is better to receive £10k of funding than try for £15k and risk getting none.
2. Remember that specifications included within the business rules are the minimum requirement that will be expected on site. Do not gold plate operations. FCW have a responsibility to ensure that that appropriate value to the public purse is obtained from funds awarded. Woodland officers are more likely to question the need for a 5m track than a 3m track and it is may be better to get some funding than risk getting none.
3. Ensure that operations are consistent with the crop e.g. formative pruning of P1900 oak is going to be queried.
4. Do not include ineligible areas such as non-forestry land, buildings, farmyards or significant open ground/water within the application as we will ask for these to be removed.
5. Avoid claiming area based grants such as squirrel control over whole woodlands and concentrate on the locations where activities will be actually carried out e.g. crops most at risk.
6. Do not include new planting sub-cpts that fall below the area thresholds – we will ask for these to be removed.
7. Ensure that evidence of farmer income is provided where the high rate of agricultural income forgone is being claimed. Where this is not provided the rate will default to the lower non-farmer rate.
8. All operations have an accompanying justification in the description and/or feature and include relevant operational information (e.g. balsam control must be carried out prior to seeding; site signage & waymarkers must be installed prior to claiming access grant).
9. When submitting a Plan email the woodland officer to confirm land registration.

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10. Ensure all operations are copied across from WIG cost calculator and that this has been uploaded to the case. A separate entry line must be used in GLOS and the WIG Cost calculator for each year that an operation is carried out.
11. When a woodland officer requests changes then we would advise that planners make these rather than delay the case by arguing. This has a knock on effect of tying up woodland officer time and as deadlines get closer puts that case and others at risk.

The woodland officer's priority is to focus on cases already submitted. We will endeavour to provide advice on cases to be submitted but this is entirely dependent on that woodland officer's workload at that time. Checking applications and business rules and getting it right first time will mean that G&R staff can deal with casework more efficiently.

Mapping/digital data

Where we receive digital mapping which does not appear to snap to OSMM boundaries we will correct these rather than return to planners for correction. It is therefore important that planners check that they are content that the mapping is accurate when carrying out spatial linking.

When we receive digital data which is significantly inaccurate that we need to correct, then we will consider withholding the GIS fee as paying this is unfair on planners who do take the time to prepare accurate maps.

SBVs – why have these gone

We have found that Site Based Variables (SBVs) lead to excessive administration in relation to the benefits that they provide. Therefore these will no longer be permitted and have been removed from the business rules. Only operations in the WIG cost calculator are permitted.

Amendments

In some cases planners, applicants and agents have submitted amendments for additional grant aid. In accordance with Information Note 13 in no circumstances will any increase in grant aid be approved. Where unforeseen natural events occur we may consider amendments to change felling and restock areas but there will be no additional grant aid. Where significant new information comes to light we will agree amendments to remove or change potentially damaging operations but there will be no additional grant aid.

Responding to invalid amendments diverts staff time from dealing with casework.

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Felling Licences

Sometimes felling licences are being submitted for work that is also included, or will be included within a BWW. We appreciate the need for receiving felling approval so that this can be carried out prior to the BWW being approved. However we would urge applicants to consider whether this is really required. A separate felling licence is not required where work is already approved under a BWW. Felling licences are administered by the same staff dealing with BWW so unnecessary applications increase workload and have a knock on effect on other casework.