

Woodland Assessment Grant Guide

Purpose

Woodland Assessment Grant (WAG) contributes to the standard costs of undertaking specified assessments when the FC considers that further information is required before decisions can be made.

The objective is to improve the sustainable management of woodland by ensuring that management decisions are based on good knowledge of the sensitivities and needs of the woodland and the opportunities to derive public benefits.

Eligibility

Applicants will normally be invited to apply for this grant when required but uninvited applications will be considered on their merits where funding permits. WAG will generally be offered where the FC has approved an application for a Woodland Planning Grant, or is considering an application for a Felling Licence or other grant, and that consideration requires more specific information about known sensitivities. The following will determine whether a grant would be offered:

- Availability of the required information from other sources.
- The degree to which management decisions rely on the required information.
- Sensitivity of the site and any special designations such as SSSIs or similar European designations, Ancient Woodland Sites or known Biodiversity Action Plan priority species and habitats.
- Proximity to dwellings and the level of public usage and visibility.
- Intensity, scale and significance of the proposed management and methods to be employed such as harvesting and regeneration methods in relation to the woodland size and sensitivities.

Situations not eligible for Woodland Assessment Grant

- WAG will not be offered where the information is not required by the FC in order to satisfactorily discharge its statutory duties or to deliver grants.
- WAG cannot be paid on a non-woodland site.
- WAG will not be offered where the information is required to comply with any legislation, regulation or other grants scheme not administered by Defra or the Forestry Commission.

Eligible assessments

ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

In ecologically sensitive woodland (e.g. ancient or semi-natural woodland) where operations are proposed that are likely to have a significant impact.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN PLAN

In sensitive/prominent landscapes, where the planned scale or type of operations could potentially have significant visual impact.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL ASSESSMENT

Where there is evidence on the site of an interest that the proposals will affect, or where local partnerships have identified a value in further assessment, prior to operations taking place in woodland.

DETERMINING STAKEHOLDER INTERESTS

Where a stakeholder or community meeting needs to be held to explore likely interest or where such interest has been expressed and needs to be discussed.

Grant

The grant rates for WAG in all regions of England are as follows

Assessment type	Grant rate	Minimum payment
Ecological Assessment	£5.60 / ha	£300
Landscape Design Plan	£2.80 / ha	£300
Historic and Cultural Assessment	£5.60 / ha	£300
Determining Stakeholder Interests	£300 per assessment	£300

Main requirements

Applicants must first submit an application for grant using the EWGS forms for this purpose available from the FC website or any FC office. If accepted, the Forestry Commission will make a grant offer and seek to agree a contract that sets out the expected timescale, claim timetable and the area over which the grant will be calculated. The application comprises the application forms and an acceptable map.

The applicant will use the agreed period to undertake the assessment, or arrange for the assessment to be undertaken by a contractor, and present the results to the FC in the manner and timing prescribed in the grant contract.

Using a competent assessor

Anyone may undertake an assessment but the risk that the quality of the assessment work may be deemed unacceptable for grant remains with the applicant. Opting to use an assessor with a proven competence in the type of assessment required can significantly reduce this risk. The FC can provide a list of known individuals who have demonstrated competency in each assessment area and is available on request.

Making an application

Before preparing an application, we recommend you check that there is funding still available for the work you wish to propose. This will avoid wasted time preparing an application if funds are already fully subscribed. To find out whether there is funding still available, contact your local FC office or look at the grant availability webpage for your region, available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-regions.

The application comprises the completed forms and an acceptable map. Forms are available from FC offices or from the FC website www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs.

The applicant will need to complete forms *EWGS 1* and *EWGS 3* and provide an Ordnance Survey MasterMap® for the application. For a Landscape Design Plan and for Determining Stakeholder Interests the map need only show the boundaries of the woodlands covered by the assessment. For Ecological or Historic and Cultural Assessments the map must show the subcompartments in which the assessment will take place.

The FC cannot accept maps that are not Ordnance Survey MasterMap®. Base maps of the required quality can be obtained free of charge from the Forestry Commission by completing a request form. This request form is in *EWGS 1 – General Guide to EWGS*, available at www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs. This guide explains the EWGS map requirements more fully.

Approval and use of the information

Approval of the assessments

Assessment(s) should be presented in the format agreed. Any required clarifications or changes will be discussed before approval. The applicant must then prepare a copy of the final assessment for the Forestry Commission to approve and retain.

The FC prefers all assessments to be submitted electronically as Microsoft Office documents.

Use of the assessment information

Applicants will be free to use the information for any purpose including to support any current or subsequent application for EWGS or felling permission. When grant has been paid, the information will be deemed to be public information. The FC will retain a copy and may make it, or other information about it, available publicly or specifically to legitimate interests.

The Forestry Commission and Defra may use the information to determine any existing or future application for felling or grant. In some cases the information may indicate that the most appropriate action is not to carry out any further work.

Claims and payments

Claims

Applicants may make claims on the EWGS Claim Form as soon as the FC has agreed that the assessment report meets the requirements agreed. To allow time to approve and pay claims, applicants must submit the report to the FC at least one month before the final date by which a claim has to be made. Changes to claim year are subject to the FC England rescheduling policy, which is detailed on the *Operations Note 7 – Grant Budget Management Policy*, available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-ewgsdocuments. The FC cannot guarantee your amendment will be approved, as it is subject to grant rules and funding availability.

Payments Grants are only paid in **one** instalment upon satisfactory completion and acceptance of each separate assessment.

The payment is made to the applicant. The applicant is solely responsible for paying any fees charged by an assessor engaged to carry out the work.

Once payment is made there are no further contractual obligations on the applicant. However, if it is discovered within 5 years of the payment that the application or the assessment did not include known and essential information, then the FC may reclaim the Grant in its entirety and with interest. Similarly if it is discovered within 5 years of the payment that facts pertinent to the eligibility or intended purpose of the grant (or pertinent to any other grant or permission approved as a result) were knowingly and materially misrepresented in the application or the assessment, then the FC may reclaim the Woodland Assessment Grant in its entirety and with interest. Other grants that subsequently relied on the information contained in any assessment will also be scrutinised and considered for reclaim proceedings.

Historic and Cultural Assessment requirements

Securing the future capacity of forests and woodlands to contribute public benefits is a key Forestry Commission objective. Forests and woodlands represent a significant part of the historic environment, reflecting the history of woodland management and earlier land uses. Historic Environment features that may be found in woodland are wide ranging. They include veteran trees, often on historic boundaries, trackways, banks enclosing former coppice and evidence of charcoal production. In addition there is evidence of former settlement sites, burial features and past industries. In some parts of England, woodland is the only place where these features survive above ground level following extensive change in the surrounding landscape.

Whether or not a formal assessment is carried out, the needs of archaeology and woodland management can be reconciled and any potential conflict reduced if land managers discuss their plans with their local authority archaeology service at an early stage.

Applicants should refer to...

- Forests & Archaeology Guidelines (*Forestry Commission, 1995*)
- UK Forestry Standard (*Forestry Commission and DANI, 1998*)

Other helpful publications are...

- The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England [RCHME] - Recording Archaeological Field Monuments. A Descriptive Specification (*English Heritage, 1999*).
- National Trust Archaeology & the Historic Environment - Historic Landscape Survey Guidelines (*National Trust, 2000*).

Requirements These assessments must be undertaken using the following steps:

- a) Contact the local authority archaeological service for information held on the Sites and Monument Record (SMR) or Historic Environment Record (HER). The SMR/HER provides information about the locations where archaeological remains are known or thought likely to exist. Some of this information can be provided through the Rural Land Register but check that it is current. Where any sites are Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMS), English Heritage must be contacted. Applicants may also find it useful to see where their woodland fits into the overall historic landscape character of the area.

- b) An assessment normally involves desk-based evaluation of existing information and should make effective use of records of previous discoveries and surveys, including any historic maps held by the County archive and local museums and record offices. In some circumstances a field survey may be required.
- c) The report must contain a general description clearly and concisely noting and describing any features including:
 - A **brief** description of the historic landscape features and past industries of the local area
 - The location of any existing or known cultural boundaries, such as parish boundaries and old paths and routes through or beside the woodland
 - The extent of any Scheduled Ancient Monument or other monument including banks, pits and areas of industrial activity, the location of veteran trees and the extent of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and Ancient Woodland Sites
- d) For each area of the woodland where significant change or work is proposed, a concise description of any beneficial and detrimental effects that the proposed work is likely to have on the described historical or cultural features. The features likely to be affected must be clearly identified on maps of at least the quality required for EWGS applications. This description must clearly consider the likelihood of physical disturbance or damage caused by proposed felling, coppicing and restocking. It must also consider the potential risk of disturbance or damage arising from retaining trees on or adjacent to the feature (i.e. from subsequent windthrow, root penetration or water table movement).
- e) For each identified detrimental effect, a detailed statement of mitigating actions or working practice that would avoid or reduce damage or disturbance or impacts.

Ecological Assessment requirements

Background

Ancient semi-natural and some other kinds of native woodland are irreplaceable features in our countryside. They are particularly important for biodiversity and are often of historical and cultural significance. An assessment is usually required to recognise ecological processes and to determine how they might be affected by changes caused by woodland work. Examples where ecological assessment may be required are the introduction of thinning, coppicing or felling operations in previously undisturbed woodland (i.e. no documentary and/or visual evidence of these activities within the last 10 or more years). Proposals to create forest roads or quarries associated with road construction in both managed and unmanaged ancient or semi-natural woodlands are also deemed to be significant impacts.

Requirements

- a) A general woodland description clearly and concisely noting features including:
 - The extent of statutory, national and local conservation designations
 - The extent of woodland habitats and species listed under the UK or local Biodiversity Action Plans
 - The extent of any areas of ASNW, PAWS or OSNW
 - The extent of National Vegetation Classification communities
- b) A summary of the main features of ecological interest in the wood, indicating the relative importance of each in both a national and local context. Relevant considerations include:
 - The size, diversity, maturity and isolation of habitats
 - Unusual or rare ecological communities
 - Communities on the margins of their known distribution
 - Species rarity (national or local)

- c) For each area of the woodland where significant change or work is proposed, a concise description of any beneficial and detrimental effects that the proposed work is likely to have on specific habitats, features and associated ecological communities. The features likely to be affected must be clearly identified on maps of at least the quality required for EWGS applications. This description must clearly consider:
- soils
 - rare species
 - veteran trees
 - deadwood
 - open habitats
 - aquatic habitats
- d) For each identified detrimental effect, a detailed statement of mitigating actions or working practice that would avoid or reduce the ecological impacts.

Landscape Assessment requirements

Background

Woodlands and forests are a highly valued and visible component of many landscapes. In prominent and sensitive landscapes, special attention needs to be paid to landscape issues. Sensitive designated landscapes include National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), World Heritage Sites, Historic Parklands, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA). This list is not exhaustive and there will be other situations where Landscape Assessment may be deemed necessary.

Examples of such landscapes would include those that:

- Are on highly prominent land forms
- Are visible from well-known viewpoints and travel routes
- Contribute to an important scenic outlook from towns and villages
- Are used intensively for recreation
- Are recognised as having a special sense of place or atmosphere
- Contribute to a highly valued landscape character

Examples of significant visual impacts include progressive clear-felling and restocking over several years, or in coupes exceeding 2 ha. Landscape Assessments are particularly relevant for owners who intend phased harvesting and replanting for large forest areas or whole estates, over a period of 20 years or more. Landscape assessment may also be required for proposals to deforest areas to create open habitat.

Requirements

Applicants must produce Landscape Assessments following the guidance contained in the *Forestry Practice Guide – Forest Design Planning, a guide to good practice*, (Forestry Commission, 1998). This document is available from HMSO.

Determining Stakeholder Interests

Background

Many of the interests of the wider community are expressed through the national systems of land, conservation and heritage classifications. Taking account of more locally expressed interests can be rewarding for both the landowner and the community.

The FC will help woodland managers to decide what is appropriate but applicants are encouraged to obtain the guidelines *Involving people in forestry: a toolbox for public involvement in forest and woodland planning* (Forestry Commission, 2004). This is available on the FC website at www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox.

The level and method of local consultation that is appropriate will depend on the scale and potential impact of the proposed operations. Methods normally available include sending letters to individuals or groups, putting up temporary or permanent signs in advance of proposed management activity, providing information and articles in local newspapers and circulars or on the Internet.

A stakeholder meeting will enable you to explain your objectives and future plans to other parties who are interested in your proposals. In circumstances where the FC agrees that a stakeholder meeting would be useful to identify key issues and resolutions, a WAG may be offered as a one-off contribution to a facilitator's time and production of a report.

Requirements

- a) The FC will agree with the applicant, the organisations and other interested bodies who should participate in the stakeholder meeting. The applicant will make contact and arrange the timing and location of the meeting to ensure that all are able to contribute.
- b) The applicant will provide the participants with sufficient information to allow them to assess and consider any issues they may wish to discuss. Participants should be permitted access to the property if they request it, to see the situation on the ground before they attend the stakeholder meeting. If a participant is unable to attend the meeting then they may submit written comments by arrangement with the applicant.
- c) When you have completed the meeting you must then prepare a written report. Use your notes of the meeting and any written submissions from participants to help prepare this. The report should be printed on A4 paper and normally should not exceed 10 pages, excluding any appendices. Include all the issues raised by the participants and their relevance. Explain how the proposals or working practices will be modified to accommodate or reduce the impact of them.

Meeting checklist

- Ask for introductions from those present. They should give their name and whom they represent
- Ask if those present know of anyone who should be there, but is not
- Give apologies received from those who could not attend
- Outline the purpose of the meeting ("*...not to solve problems or try to offer solutions, but to raise those issues that need to be considered*")
- Give the order that the meeting will follow
- Outline your woodland proposals
- Ask each representative to present his or her comments about the proposals
- Discuss and ensure clear understanding of the issues raised
- At the end of the meeting, summarise the issues of concern

Preferred report structure

INTRODUCTION

- Name of the property
- EWGS reference number
- Summary of arrangements made for the meeting

PARTICIPANTS AND CONTACTS

- Name, organisation/group, address, phone number and e-mail of all participants including the applicant, woodland agent and any facilitator
- References against each participant to any correspondence included in the report or appendices

ISSUES ARISING

- Indicate each participant's objectives/desired outcomes including the owner's
- Describe any concerns expressed

- In an appendix, provide an annotated 1:10,000 map (or larger scale) to clearly show the areas affected by any of the issues raised
- In an appendix, reproduce any written responses from all those invited to the public meeting (including those attending)

ASSESSMENT

- You must make an objective assessment of the likely impact of each issue. This must recognise and highlight any areas of potential conflict between the various objectives of the participants
- State how each issue is to be handled and how you will resolve any conflicts
- Send a copy of your completed report to each participant who attended the meeting (including any that were invited but unable to attend) and to the Forestry Commission

Getting help

The FC will offer advice and help you come to decisions about how to fulfil your EWGS agreement but will not be able to help you do the assessment or draw up your report. Obtaining professional assistance is likely to be a worthwhile investment if you intend to seek further support, approvals and grants on the basis of the assessment.

The application forms are all available from www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs as is more detailed guidance on this particular grant and the full FC code covering the operation of the whole of the EWGS.

Further advice

The Forestry Commission website contains all of the information regarding EWGS and the forms needed to apply, in particular:

www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs – EWGS homepage

www.forestry.gov.uk/england-ewgsdocuments – EWGS document library

www.forestry.gov.uk/england-regions – Regional webpages that include details of regionally focussed grants

www.forestry.gov.uk/england-lis – The Land Information Search tool, telling you about special designations, features and other grant schemes that are displayed in map form

www.forestry.gov.uk/england-grants – FC England Grants and Regulations homepage. This provides links to all aspects of woodland regulations, grants available and public registers of felling/planting proposals

If you do not have access to the internet, you can request any of the information from your local Forestry Commission office.

We recommend getting professional advice on woodland management and grants. A list of national and regional professional organisations are listed at

www.forestry.gov.uk/england-advice or available from your local FC office.

This document is for information only and does not constitute an agreement of any form nor does it confer any rights. It is intended as a guide to help applicants decide whether the grant is applicable to them and whether the main requirements of any grant agreement can be met. The information is subject to change. Full and current details of the grant scheme and the requirements of any EWGS grant contract that may be made between the applicant(s) and the Forestry Commission arising from an application to the grant scheme can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs