



THE ENGLISH WOODLAND GRANT SCHEME

**A public consultation on future incentives for the sustainable
management and creation of woodlands**

**Forestry Commission England
and
Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs**

**Responses preferred by 31 December 2003
Latest date for responses - 14 January 2004**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

This section outlines the main changes and events that have led up to, and influenced, the development of the proposals for the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS). Also included in this section are details of how to respond to this consultation.

2. Context of the EWGS proposals

This section describes the role of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) through which the EWGS grants would receive approval from the European Commission. Also described are the major reviews of forestry arrangements, and the main evaluations and reviews of policy, incentives, grants and other support for woodlands that have fed into the development of the EWGS grant proposals. In line with the Government's policy of increasing regional decision making and delivery, EWGS will need to be responsive to the different priorities emerging from the development of Regional Forestry Frameworks (RFFs).

3. Rationale for the English Woodland Grant Scheme

Grants are only one of the support mechanisms available for supporting the sustainable management of woodlands and the creation of woodlands. They are nevertheless likely to be the main mechanism for Government support for privately owned woodlands for the foreseeable future. The rationale for Government support for woodlands in England is based on the understanding that sustainable woodland management helps to meet international commitments and contributes to wider strategies for sustainable development by delivering social, environmental and economic public benefits. Intervention in the context of sustainable woodland management is therefore to support the delivery of additional public benefits, or to secure those benefits where there is a risk that they will be lost.

4. The development of EWGS

This section sets out the guiding principles behind EWGS. Using these principles we propose an overall structure for EWGS that uses a single administrative structure (for efficiency) but which can deliver regionally tailored grants. We propose that EWGS will have six components – Woodland Management Planning, Woodland Assessment, Woodland Management, Woodland Regeneration, Woodland Improvement and Woodland Creation. Importantly, it is proposed to incorporate the current Farm Woodland Premium Scheme within EWGS and deliver woodland creation grants and any associated income foregone payments through one scheme. Availability of all the grant components in any region will be subject to the availability of funds. Regional Forestry Frameworks and our national business planning processes will establish the priorities where funds are oversubscribed.

5. Woodland Management Planning Grant

This is a new grant that replaces the current 'Forest Plans' and 'Native Woodland Plans' grants. It will offer a flat rate per hectare (banded) and will be available nationally at set rates. The grant will support the preparation of plans (for woodlands over 3ha) that meet the UK Woodland Assurance (UKWA) Standard for sustainable management.

6. Woodland Assessment Grant

This is a new cost-based, discretionary grant that will be available nationally on a non-competitive basis. The grant will support the gathering of specific information to improve management decisions and to focus other support where it is most needed to achieve sustainability. The assessments will require certain competencies and we are working with applicant and industry representatives to identify the knowledge and skills required.

7. Woodland Management Grant

We propose that this will be a flat rate grant to replace the current Annual Management Grant and will be available across all regions at set rates. This grant will encourage and support the basic management activities that underpin woodland sustainability. It will protect and secure the delivery of existing public benefits and improve the woodland's capacity to deliver increased public benefits. The grant is designed to complement Defra's proposed Entry Level Scheme.

8. Woodland Regeneration Grant

This proposed grant would be cost based and available in every region at fixed rates of contribution to the agreed costs. It replaces the current flat rate grant. The grant is structured to support desirable changes in the delivery of public benefits from woodland at the time of greatest opportunity i.e. when felling is planned.

9. Woodland Improvement Grant

We propose that this will be a cost based grant that extends the scope of the current Woodland Improvement Grant by including contributions to the cost of work to maintain the improvement over a longer period of time. It will fund both capital and supporting investments in woodland, over an agreed period, to create and sustain an increase in the quantity and quality of public benefits delivered. It will be available initially in all regions as a discretionary grant, at a set rate of contribution to agreed costs however this grant is designed to be focussed in

due course on regional priorities that emerge from the RFF processes. Each region will determine the eligible activities and the contribution to costs accordingly.

10. Woodland Creation Grant

The proposals for this grant will support the creation of new woodlands that are properly designed to deliver the public benefits intended and are well located, particularly in relation to where people live. The proposals simplify the grant rates and clarify the eligibility criteria over current WGS arrangements, which this grant will replace. Higher grant payments will be available for applications that meet priority objectives such as providing public access. This grant will be available on a competitive basis using, initially, a national scoring system to rank proposals on the delivery of public benefits. When RFF processes are completed, woodland creation grant rates will be tailored, and funds allocated through regional scoring systems according to the identified regional priorities for woodland creation. It is not intended that the income foregone payments to be delivered under EWGS will be subject to regional variation.

11. EWGS requirements for public access

We propose that newly created woodlands offering public access will be eligible to receive Woodland Improvement Grants to contribute to the costs of creating facilities for public use. We propose that EWGS grant eligibility for such woodlands will rely on the agreement to permit public access 30 years rather than the current 10.

Funding under Woodland Improvement Grant for public access facilities in existing woodlands will depend on the agreement to permit public access for 10, 20 or 30 years. The period of commitment will be linked to the level of public funding agreed.

12. Links to agri-environment schemes.

The proposals for EWGS and Defra's Entry Level and Higher Tier schemes have not been developed in isolation. Farmers will have the option of creating small woodlands and managing existing woodlands under Defra's HTS where this needs to be closely linked to the overall management of the farm, and where it fits the priorities of that scheme.

13. Administration systems

Defra and the Forestry Commission are currently engaged in developing modern systems that will facilitate information sharing, communications and support for applicants. We propose that EWGS support to applicants will include application maps and online forms, information and claim processes. Applicants will not be required to use IT to access EWGS but it will be encouraged. We propose that all payments will have to be made by BACS transfer.

14. Transition and Timing

Plans to move from WGS / FWPS to EWGS must remain provisional until the Rural Delivery Review recommendations are known and decisions about the future have been taken. At this time we expect the EWGS grants to be available for application early in 2005. When WGS and FWPS are eventually closed, all existing agreements will be honoured.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Section 4.4

Q1. Do you think that the proposed scope of EWGS grants is adequate to meet the overarching objectives? If not, how could the scope be improved?

Section 5.4

Q2. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WPG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

Section 6.4

Q3. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WAG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

Section 7.3

Q4. Do you think that the activities proposed for WMG are appropriate and adequate? If not, what are your concerns and are there other actions that you would wish to see included?

Section 7.4

Q5. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WMG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

Section 8.4

Q6. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WRG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

Section 9.4

Q7. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WIG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

Section 10.2

Q8. Do you consider that the Woodland Creation Grant objectives adequately express the current priorities for grant support for new woodlands? If not, why?

Section 10.3

Q9. Do you think that the proposed woodland categories appropriately cover the new aims and priorities of for EWGS support for woodland creation? If not, what do you think has been omitted?

Section 10.3

Q10. Do you think the proposed eligibility criteria above are appropriate to the woodland categories? If not, how could they be improved?

Section 10.4

Q11. Do you generally support the proposed arrangements for WCG grant payment? Please tell us if anything in the proposals concerns you and why.

Section 10.5

Q12. Do you generally support the changes to FWPS proposed above? Please tell us if anything in the proposals concerns you and why.

Section 10.5

Q13. Do you have any comments on the proposed continuation of the above exclusions from the FWP bearing in mind that the payments are concerned solely with the conversion of agricultural land to woodland? Please indicate clearly to which exclusion(s) your comments refer.

Section 11.3

Q14. Do you generally support the proposed EWGS requirements for support for public access? Please tell us if anything in the proposals concerns you and why.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The English Woodland Grant Scheme consultation

1.1.1 This public consultation on the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) builds on previous consultations covering various components of the grants and mechanisms undertaken over the past three years. We would like to thank all those who have contributed their time and thoughts to this process so far. The document sets out the context within which the grants must operate, the national administrative structure to be put in place, and the areas of flexibility for local offices to operate the grants to meet both national and Regional priorities.

1.1.2 In this consultation, we seek your comments and views on the proposals for;

- the national framework for EWGS
- introducing regional flexibility
- the details of the proposed grants

1.1.3 The Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (FWPS) have been reviewed in the light of the Ministerial commitment to re-shape and simplify schemes, which resulted in the Agri-environment Schemes Review. The Policy Review of Woodland Creation (April 2003) undertaken jointly by the Forestry Commission (FC) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) was conducted by an independent steering group that made recommendations on the future shape and direction of England's woodland creation grants. The Sustaining England's Woodlands Review (October 2002) looked at the whole of the Forestry Commission's support for sustainable management of England's woodland and the recommendations, where they relate to direct grant supports, have helped shape the proposals for the EWGS.

1.1.4 Forestry policy has been devolved to country administrations and this has also had a part to play in driving the re-shaping of England's woodland grants. With the parallel development in Scotland and Wales of country specific grants and support mechanisms, devolution has offered the opportunity to address more closely the particular needs of the English Regions. This process is currently underway with the development of Regional Forestry Frameworks that will set out the agreed direction and priorities for woodland support.

1.1.5 There are many other factors influencing the shape of woodland grants some of which, may well influence how woodland support is to be made available in future. For example, pending decisions on the outcome of Lord Haskins' review, it remains uncertain what organisation will be responsible for delivering the EWGS. This consultation is, however, principally concerned with the current proposals for the structures and levels of support rather than the wider issues surrounding the method of delivery. Furthermore, the Government has already accepted that woodland creation grants in England should be incorporated into a single scheme. Therefore this consultation also covers the provision of annual income forgone payments for new woodland planted on agricultural land, the payments for which are currently administered by Defra under the FWPS.

1.1.6 Comments from this consultation will be used to develop the final EWGS structure and detail, which will then be included in a submission to modify the England Rural Development Programme early in 2004 for implementation in 2005. All changes to the current arrangements are subject to European Commission (EC) approval.

1.2 How to respond to this consultation

1.2.1 Where we are seeking your responses to specific questions, these appear in boxes within the text and are summarised at the front of this document. It will be helpful if you can include the question reference in your responses.

- This document is available from the Internet at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs>
- It will be helpful if your response could be with us by the end of December 2003 but if this is not possible, it must arrive by 14 January 2004 at the latest. We will acknowledge receipt.
- All responses should be made in writing to:

Mr Paul Johnston
Forestry Commission
Great Eastern House
Tenison Road
Cambridge
CB1 2DU

- Facsimile: 01223 460699

- E-mailed responses may be sent to paul.johnston@forestry.gsi.gov.uk and it will be most helpful if the subject line of the e-mail included the words "EWGS consultation response". Please do not return edited versions of the consultation document as your response.

1.2.2 All comments received may be made publicly available unless you indicate clearly in your response that you do not consent to this. Confidentiality disclaimers generated by your e-mail system will not be treated as such a request.

1.2.3 Responses should ideally include the contact details of a person who will be in a position to respond to any queries we may have about the comments made.

1.2.4 Any queries about the details set out in the consultation document, or requests for a printed copy, should be addressed to Paul Johnston at the above Cambridge address (tel. 01223 314546)

1.2.5 If you have any comments or concerns about the conduct of this consultation exercise you should make these in writing and address them to Mr Richard Barker, Secretariat, at the above Cambridge address, or by e-mail to richard.barker@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

2 CONTEXT OF THE EWGS PROPOSALS

2.1 England Rural Development Programme (ERDP)

2.1.1 The European Rural Development Regulation (RDR) requires each member state to seek approval for schemes that support projects encompassed by the prescribed measures within the Regulation. EC approval covers co-financed schemes (where the EC contributes to the grants paid) and State-aided schemes (where the Exchequer funds the grants entirely). This approval is given via the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) which covers the seven-year period 2000 to 2006. Currently a mid-term evaluation is underway to check progress against achievement targets.

2.1.2 The current Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (FWPS), are part of the ERDP, along with eight other schemes, which range from agri-environment schemes such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme to schemes promoting the adaptation and development of rural areas such as the Rural Enterprise Scheme. The overall scope of the EWGS is the planning, management and creation of woodlands. There are also plans to introduce in the future, a separate project-based grant scheme to support the harvesting, processing and marketing of woodland products. This scheme will also come under the ERDP.

2.1.3 Following this consultation, the final EWGS proposals will be included in a modification to the ERDP that will seek approval for these changes and also for the revisions to the agri-environment schemes currently being developed. The EWGS proposals therefore need to meet the requirements under the RDR for EC support.

2.2 Forestry Devolution Review

2.2.1 The Interdepartmental Group report of the Forestry Devolution Review was published in 2002. The review looked at the current administrative arrangements for delivering sustainable forestry policies in England, Scotland, and Wales and the UK's international commitments, including options for further devolution of these arrangements.

2.2.2 In response to the Review, Ministers concluded that the Forestry Commission should continue as a cross-border public body while domestic policy development and implementation should be fully devolved to each country and forestry should be more closely integrated with other policy work. This decision was implemented on 1 April 2003 in England with an FC/Defra agreement to integrate more closely, policy development and service delivery.

2.3 Review of Forestry Arrangements in England

2.3.1 Defra's Spending Review 2002 settlement in July 2002 required that it should commission, jointly with HM Treasury, a Review of Forestry Arrangements in England. In the light of the Spending Review settlement and the Forestry Devolution Review, Ministers concluded that the terms of reference for this Review should be to:

- Examine the economic rationale that underpins the Government's policy goals for forestry in England.
- Consider the role of forestry in the Government's strategies for sustainable development.
- Make recommendations on what organisational structure is most appropriate for delivering forestry policy in the

light of the wider Defra Rural Delivery Review.

2.3.2 The first stage of this review was an Economic Analysis of Forestry Policy in England published on 5 June 2003 . The analysis examined the economic rationale behind the Government's policy goals for forestry identified in the England Forestry Strategy 1998, along with its contribution to Government strategies for sustainable development.

2.3.3 The report of the Review of Forestry Arrangements was submitted to Ministers in July and was fed into Lord Haskins' Rural Delivery Review. The grant proposals upon which we are consulting must remain provisional until this review process has concluded and Ministers have taken decisions in the light of the recommendations.

2.4 Reviews and evaluations of woodland incentives

2.4.1 A number of internal and external evaluations have been carried out that have either provided input to the development of the new EWGS proposals or have indicated the need for change.

- Sustaining England's Woodlands Review

This looked at the FC's role in relation to the sustainable management of existing woodland, and included a public consultation exercise. The Steering Group's Report and the FC's response were published in October 2002.
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/hcou-4z6k5n>

The two principal recommendations from the above review that related to grants were:

- That a fundamental re-assessment of grants should be undertaken.
- That grants should be more responsive to regional and local needs.

The Forestry Commission accepted these recommendations, and a number of subsidiary recommendations relating to grants.

- Policy Review of Woodland Creation in England

This looked at grant support for woodland creation under WGS and FWPS, and included public consultation. The Steering Group's Report and the FC/Defra response were published in April 2003.
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-59yhgx>

The recommendations of the review Steering Group were, for the most part, accepted by the Government. The key points concerning grants for woodland creation were that they should adequately engage with woodland owners and communities, offer targeted and regionalised grants within a national framework that complements other land-based incentive schemes and deliver diverse public benefits.

- The Economic Analysis of Forestry Policy in England

CJC Consulting with Pearce, D and Willis, K. Report to Defra and HM Treasury (April 2003)

The economic analysis suggests that there is a strong case for government intervention in forestry as it can deliver public good outputs in the form of urban and peri-urban amenity and local access, recreation, biodiversity and urban regeneration. The analysis also suggests that on the basis of currently available research evidence, the case for government intervention is less strong in the following areas: timber (unless public good output is put at risk by failure to manage woodlands sustainably); water and air pollution; rural amenity and landscape and rural development.

- Review of Targeting Mechanisms

Garforth, M. Report to the Forestry Commission (2001)

This analysis of the performance of challenge funds and locational supplements for incentivising highly targeted woodland management and creation projects, concluded that challenges were not always as efficient as a flat rate grant. Challenges are likely to be more efficient where the purpose is to generate larger volumes of activity over short periods of time. A wider range of objectives creates a larger potential pool of varied projects and helps make the challenge mechanism more efficient. These will be key considerations for the development of regional targeting mechanisms under EWGS.

- The Evaluation of the Community Woodland Supplement

Macaulay Land Use Research Institute with University of Manchester. Report to the Forestry Commission (March 2001).

This report recommended that incentives and support for public access in new woodlands should be focussed more on urban measures. Efficiency of support would be improved by introducing discretionary incentives and local eligibility criteria. Varying levels of support were likely to be more appropriate to address issue of generally poor quality facilities, and the period over which access is required to be permitted, should be extended.

2.5 Regional flexibility

2.5.1 Government policy is to progressively devolve decision making on the delivery of services so that policy making and service delivery becomes increasingly responsive to local needs. The majority of public benefits associated with woodlands and forestry are experienced locally and it is therefore particularly important that there is local involvement on the nature of public benefits to be provided by woodlands and how they can be delivered.

2.5.2 The Forestry Commission's response to the Government's regional agenda is to move towards regional decision making and delivery arrangements within an enabling national framework. This framework will ensure that national priorities are delivered in a manner that is informed by, and responsive to, local needs.

2.5.3 Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies are leading the development processes for Regional Forestry Frameworks (RFFs), which will be concluded by the end of 2004. Each RFF and its subsequent action plan will be the basis for determining how the resources currently deployed by the FC, and by other public bodies involved with woodland may best be targeted to meet regional needs.

2.5.4 The new EWGS proposals include the potential for significant levels of regional flexibility within the national structure. Subject to EU rules, this will allow certain regional discretion to secure additional resources, adjust the relative emphasis on existing and new woodland and vary the grant rates, selection processes and delivery mechanisms to suit the particular needs of each region. Proposals to operate this flexibility would be agreed through national business planning processes taking account of priorities identified in RFFs, and procedures in the EU Rural Development Regulation.

2.6 Modernising Government and E-Business

2.6.1 In response to this Government initiative, the Forestry Commission commenced a review of their grants and licences functions in 2000. One outcome has been to initiate a large project using 'Invest to Save' funds awarded by HM Treasury to develop a completely new administrative system to take advantage of newer technology and communications media and so reduce the costs of delivering our grants.

2.6.2 This development also presents an excellent opportunity for the Forestry Commission to create modern, responsive systems that deliver the new regional grants and targeting mechanisms that will be required to support and sustain the delivery of woodland benefits to society from private woodland owners. Defra and the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) are also modernising their IT systems with a view to providing a more cost effective and efficient service to customers.

3 RATIONALE FOR THE ENGLISH WOODLAND GRANT SCHEME

3.1.1 Government policy on forestry is set out in Sustainable Forestry in the UK (2003) and the England Forestry Strategy (EFS) (1998). The aim of the EFS is the sustainable management of existing woods and forests and a continued steady expansion of the woodland area in order to provide more benefits to society and the environment.

3.1.2 In England 20% of woodlands are in public ownership, largely through the Forestry Commission, while 80% are owned by a wide variety of individuals, organisations and businesses with a diverse range of objectives. In this context, the Government intervenes in forestry to ensure the delivery of relevant public benefits, which would not otherwise be provided in sufficient quantity or quality by private arrangements. The most direct public benefits include the creation and maintenance of habitats for wildlife, producing healthy living and working environments for people, protecting biodiversity and aspects of our cultural heritage, and providing safe areas for recreation and sport. Public opinion surveys indicate strong support for these benefits. Woodlands also represent a significant social, environmental and economic asset, in their capacity to deliver public benefits. Sustainable management of our woodland ensures that in deriving the benefits that are important to today's society, we do not compromise the ability for future generations to derive whatever public benefits may be important to them.

3.1.3 As evidenced by the breadth of the recommendations from the Sustaining England's Woodland Review, grants are only one of a number of mechanisms available to the Government to support woodlands. Other mechanisms include regulation, research, training, market development, business support, partnerships and the public ownership of woodlands. Nevertheless, grants and the public ownership of land are likely to be the largest areas for Government intervention in woodlands and forests for the foreseeable future. We will continue to work on strengthening the range of mechanisms to more effectively engage with the diversity of circumstances and woodland ownership across England.

3.1.4 Government intervention is based on the understanding that sustainable woodland management (also termed sustainable forest management at a larger scale) provides the overarching framework through which woodlands contribute towards the Government's strategies for sustainable development and provides the platform for supplying specific economic, social and environmental benefits. The woodland management cycle in accordance with the UK Forestry

Standard has a key role to play in sustainable development by:

- Protecting natural resources and the cultural environment.
- Creating and sustaining environments which are conducive for delivering public benefits.
- Providing funding which can be used to offset the cost of providing benefits.
- Helping to implement international commitments on sustainable development by promoting the use of timber from sustainably managed woodlands.

3.15 Government intervention within the context of sustainable woodland management is therefore motivated not by any desire to support timber production as a commodity *per se*, but rather to safeguard the provision of existing public benefits from woodlands. Intervention should therefore support situations where additional public benefits are to be provided, or where the continued delivery of existing public benefits may be put at risk by a failure to manage woodland sustainably.

3.16 The level of Government intervention in woodlands will be influenced by:

- The value placed by society on the public benefits of woodlands.
- The coincidence of public and private objectives.
- The level of incentives which will be necessary to secure the support of sufficient landowners in sufficient woodlands to serve public objectives within available budgets.

3.17 The foregoing paragraphs provide the wider rationale and underpinning values for the EWGS. It will have an important role in helping to sustain and build a strong partnership between Government and woodland owners in the transparent provision of public benefits from private woodlands.

4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF EWGS

4.1 Guiding principles

4.11 We have identified several drivers for change from the context described in section 2. These have been expressed as a set of principles that have been agreed by Ministers and used to develop the EWGS proposals. The principles are set out below.

4.12 The EWGS will...

- be responsive to Country level policies following devolution of forestry policy (WGS and FWPS were constructed originally to meet GB policy objectives);
- provide a national framework but with the ability for it to be used flexibly in response to regional and local priorities (these priorities will be identified through Regional Forestry Frameworks currently under development in each region);
- achieve maximum public benefit for expenditure taking account of recommendations from policy, delivery and value for money reviews
- join up with other ERDP schemes by:
 - merging WGS and FWPS into one scheme;
 - using consistent public benefit principles for grant aid;
 - establishing close links with agri-environment schemes so that measures to further the role of woodland in delivering public benefit are deployed cost-effectively within an integrated approach;
- reduce administration costs. This will be achieved through a twin track approach by:
 - simplifying the grant administration structure
 - introducing modernised FC administration systems, including compatibility with and links to the new Defra ERDP and RPA IT systems which are being developed;
- reduce bureaucracy for applicants. This will be achieved through making better and more relevant information available, simplifying the grant administration systems and providing the opportunity for electronic applications and claims.

4.2 Broad structure of EWGS

4.2.1 We propose that there will be a common grant application and administration system. This will provide a consistent and efficient operating environment that supports internal and external communications, and facilitates coherent delivery of information and grants. This administrative system will enable the Forestry Commission and Defra to direct and monitor the EWGS contributions to Government commitments and expectations at National and International levels.

4.2.2 Every region will use the system to administer the EWGS whilst the grants themselves will be agreed and delivered at regional level to permit an appropriate and tailored response to regional priorities. This will enable every region to offer a suite of EWGS grants, with common delivery mechanisms, but allowing differences in focus and / or value between regions. The flexibility will include the potential for each region to secure and utilise additional funding from external sources through the RFF process.

4.2.3 Proposals for introducing regional variation to EWGS grants will be subject to checks and balances. The proposals will need to be within the envelope of ERDP approval for woodland grants, meet the aims of EWGS and be transparently shaped to meet regional priorities identified through the RFF process. They will also have to satisfy our national business planning processes, which will consider the balance of the range of grants to be offered within the region, the public benefits that the grants would seek to secure, and the costs of the grants themselves.

4.2.4 The initial EWGS grants will all be available, at the same value, in every region until the above processes have been worked through and any agreed variation to the grants can be promoted and implemented.

4.3 Objectives of the EWGS

4.3.1 The component grants of EWGS will have their own objectives and where regions decide to focus the grants to meet the priorities in the RFF action plans, the objectives will be specified more closely to suit. Nevertheless, there are overarching objectives for EWGS. These are:

- To sustain and increase the public benefits derived from existing woodlands in England.
- To invest in the creation of new woodlands in England of a size, type and location that most effectively delivers public benefits.

4.4 Proposed scope of the EWGS

4.4.1 As a key part of the total support for England's woodlands, EWGS will be the main mechanism for delivering grant based support to private woodland owners. EWGS grants will contribute to the costs of undertaking woodland activities that provide important public benefits. Wherever possible, we have constructed EWGS to be comparable with, and complimentary to, Defra's proposed new Entry Level and Higher Tier agri-environment Schemes.

4.4.2 We propose that there will be six components of EWGS, each addressing specific support needs.

• Woodland Management Planning

This grant is designed to encourage effective woodland management planning that recognises the different values of the woodlands and guides sustainable management actions. It will be available in every region on a non-competitive, but discretionary basis.

• Woodland Assessment

This grant is designed to support the provision of key information to inform plan preparation and decisions on other woodland grant and licence applications. It will be available in every region on a non-competitive, but discretionary basis.

• Woodland Management

This grant is designed to encourage the sustainable management of woodlands for the delivery of public benefits. It will be available in every region on a non-competitive basis. The grant is intended as an equivalent approach, in the forestry context, to the agri-environment Entry Level Scheme.

• Woodland Regeneration

This grant supports desirable changes to woodland structure, species and sustainability following felling activity. The grant will be available in all regions on a non-competitive basis.

- **Woodland Improvement**

This grant is designed to support and secure desirable change within woodlands, which increase or sustain the delivery of public benefits where there are identified policy priorities to do so in the areas of access, education, health, heritage and biodiversity. The grant is intended as an equivalent approach to Defra's proposed agri-environment Higher Tier Scheme.

Regions may use this grant to support more than one priority and will determine the specific eligibility criteria and funding accordingly. The grant may also be made available on either a competitive or non-competitive basis, as the region requires.

- **Woodland Creation**

This grant is designed to support the creation of new woodlands of a type, size and location that best delivers public benefits in the region. The grant will be available on a competitive basis utilising regional scoring systems within a nationally agreed framework, and the grants will be funded according to each region's priorities.

In accordance with the FC/Defra response on the review of woodland creation, provision is being made within EWGS to deliver agricultural income foregone payments (currently delivered under Defra's Farm Woodland Premium Scheme).

4.4.3 It is intended that the components may be applied singly or in combination according to the specific needs and circumstances of each area in the application. For instance...

- Receipt of a planning grant to prepare a management plan for an existing woodland will not necessarily rule out the use of assessment grants to obtain necessary detailed information about environmental, cultural and social sensitivities to inform the plan.
- Planning and assessment grants may be used to determine the priorities for application of improvement, management and regeneration grants.
- Improvement grants can be used to create access and recreation facilities in newly created woodland where that is deemed appropriate.
- Felling and regeneration grant proposals in sensitive woodlands can be informed by information collected using an assessment grant.

4.4.4 As with the current WGS, applications to EWGS will be encouraged to include all the grant components appropriate to the proposed activity in existing woodlands, including associated felling and thinning proposals. As happens now, any necessary felling licence will accompany the grant approval documents. Woodland creation proposals will still need to be submitted as separate applications to facilitate the selection and assessment procedures.

4.4.5 More detail on the proposals for each component of EWGS is set out from section 5 onwards.

Q1. Do you think that the proposed scope of EWGS grants is adequate to meet the overarching objectives? If not, how could the scope be improved?

4.5 Targeting and selection procedures

4.5.1 The proposed grant rates have been based on the expected costs associated with the activity being supported commensurate with the expected level of public benefit delivered. Grant funds from Treasury and the EU are not unlimited and in most regions, there is potential that demand for EWGS will exceed the funds available. Existing WGS and FWPS agreements will of course be honoured and new EWGS approvals will have funds allocated for the agreed claim years. Nevertheless, it is likely that regions will need to use targeting and selection mechanisms to focus the unallocated funds on the most important priorities, and limit the availability of some components of EWGS. Since 2000 a national scoring system for WGS (and any related FWPS) woodland creation proposals has been used to prioritise applications for funding and it is intended that this will continue under EWGS with greater regional influence on the criteria used. RFFs and their associated action plans will inform the decisions on all regional targeting and selection procedures.

4.5.2 Challenge funding, where applicants are invited to submit competitive bids for grant to meet highly specific woodland management or creation criteria, may also be used by regions in response to RFF action plans. We propose that it will be possible for any component or combination of components of EWGS to be offered under the challenge mechanism subject to meeting national business planning requirements.

5 WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING GRANT

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The Woodland Management Planning Grant (WPG) proposals have developed from the objectives and experience of the current Forest Plan Grant and Native Woodland Plans pilot. Both these initiatives sought to ensure that the principles of sustainable woodland management were properly considered in the generation of plans to guide management activities. The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) underlines the benefits of planning at the property or landscape levels to ensure that management objectives for woodlands seek to protect, sustain and increase the public benefits that are provided. Forest plans were most ideally suited to re-structuring larger scale forests and woodland properties, whereas Native Woodland Plans provided a level of detail required to plan site level activities within the most important woodlands.

5.1.2 To achieve acceptable levels of planning for sustained delivery of public benefits from woodland across a wide area of England, we propose to clarify and simplify the current arrangements. It is proposed to introduce a single planning grant for the production of plans that meet the requirements for the UK Woodland Assurance (UKWA) Standard. This Standard is viewed as the most suitable third party verification of adherence to the UKFS requirements. Using this independent Standard makes approval decisions more transparent and supportable, and means that woodland owners will not have to prepare different management plans if they wish to have their woodlands certified against the UKWA Standard. The collection of detailed information on sensitive sites will be covered by Woodland Assessment Grants set out in the next section.

5.2 Objectives of WPG

5.2.1 Woodland Management Planning Grant will contribute to the costs of producing management plans for existing woodlands, and which meet the UKWA Standard requirements. The grant's objectives are:

- To realise opportunities for sustaining and securing more public benefit from existing woodlands.
- To help owners to realise their own objectives, and help them access ERDP woodland grants and other forms of support.
- To capture a sufficiently complete picture in order that all decisions about woodland operations are efficient, based on good evidence and are sustainable.
- To support owners in achieving independent certification to the UK Woodland Assurance (UKWA) Standard.

5.3 Proposed operation of WPG

5.3.1 We propose that this grant will be available in all regions and all woodlands will be eligible, except those where we have already grant aided the production of a Forest Plan. The eligibility of Forest Plans 'in progress' when WPG opens for applications however will be considered on a case by case basis. Only one plan will be funded per property, and all the woodlands, of any age, on a property must be included. Planting proposals may be indicated within a plan but will require separate application and approval.

5.3.2 We propose to offer a template that applicants can complete to prepare their woodland plan within an agreed time-scale. The template will meet the requirements of the UKWA Standard and applicants may then use the plan in any application for Certification of the woodlands under that Standard if they wish. Plans that cover several adjacent properties will be accepted and encouraged. Felling permissions and operational grants will not be approved through the WPG route.

5.3.3 Where there is already an existing plan that meets the requirements of the UKWA Standard WPG will not be paid.

5.4 Proposed payments for WPG

5.4.1 The proposed payments for WPG have been derived from experience with Forest Plans and Native Woodland Plans. The experience suggests that the complexity of woodland planning in England is significantly greater than the GB-wide Forest Plans grants took account of. The rates proposed also take into account the need to contribute to certain fixed costs by assisting smaller woodland properties to a greater degree whilst maintaining a simple grant structure. They also take into account the experience we have gained from the Native Woodland Plan pilot, in that the proposals for Woodland Assessment Grants (detailed in the next section) will provide focussed additional support for specific information needs associated with the preparation of an acceptable plan.

5.4.2 A simple banded grant is proposed:

<u>For the first 100 ha</u>	£10 per hectare
<u>For the remaining area</u>	£5 per hectare

5.4.3 We propose that the minimum plan area that we will consider will be 3 ha but areas below 30ha will receive a fixed payment of £300. The minimum area recognises that many smaller woodland holdings on farm properties will have the option of accessing support under Defra's proposed schemes. The proposed minimum £300 payment recognises that plans for smaller woodlands have basic costs that are comparable with one to two days' professional input, and to offer less than this would be insufficient to engage and support woodland owners.

5.4.4 Where funds are oversubscribed, we may exercise regional discretion within an agreed business plan, to prioritise or limit the eligibility and acceptance of applications. Where an application covers more than one property, the grant for each property will be calculated and funded separately so that the grant banding does not disadvantage wider-scale applications from groups of landowners. WPG will be a single payment made upon our agreeing that the completed plan meets the requirements of the UKWA Standard.

Q2. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WPG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

6 WOODLAND ASSESSMENT GRANT

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The Woodland Assessment Grant (WAG) proposals are intended to closely support the Woodland Management Planning Grant. The Native Woodland Plan pilot highlighted the advantages of supporting the information gathering process separately from the planning process. Firstly such support can be focussed to seek only relevant information that is actually required. Secondly, such support can be applied outside the planning process to inform decision making on ad-hoc proposals for woodland management.

6.1.2 This separation of information and planning means that support for the planning element can be made simpler, and support for assessment and information gathering can be more widely available, and more precisely targeted and funded. These advantages help reduce "dead weight" or inequity in the grants and provide efficient support mechanisms for sustainable woodland management, and hence delivery of the associated public benefits, across an increased woodland area.

6.2 Objective of WAG

6.2.1 The objective of the Woodland Assessment Grant is...

- To support the sustainable management of woodland by ensuring that management decisions, and the determination of applications to undertake management activities, are based on good knowledge of the sensitivities and needs of the woodland and the opportunities to derive public benefits.

6.3 Proposed operation of WAG

6.3.1 We propose that Woodland Assessment Grant will be available in all regions. All woodland will be potentially eligible but the grant will be available on a discretionary basis. WAG will be used to assist with the costs of obtaining information about the woodland concerned in the following areas...

- Ecological assessment. In ecologically sensitive woodland (e.g. ancient or semi-natural woodland) where operations that are likely to have a significant impact are proposed.
- Landscape assessment. In sensitive/prominent landscapes, where the planned scale of operations will have significant impact.
- Historic and cultural heritage 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 (including local communities). Where there is a likely interest, or where an interest has been expressed, for which a public meeting is an appropriate response.

6.3.2 Stand-alone assessments (undertaken outside the context of preparing a management plan) may also be supported to determine whether operations carried out outside the context of a plan are appropriate. In some cases we may deem such an assessment to be a requirement that must be completed before an application to manage or fell woodland can be decided.

6.3.3 We propose that all assessments will need to be carried out by agreed individuals with the appropriate competencies. Each region will identify and maintain details of those individuals that can, and wish to, provide these assessment services. Once RFFs are in place each region may develop priorities for the use of WAG depending on the emphasis that information needs are given regionally.

6.3.4 The decision to offer WAG grant will be most strongly influenced by...

- The availability of the required information from other sources (including any obtained from site visits).
- The degree to which the plan or decision relies on the required information.
- The information needs indicated by the sensitivity of the site and any special designations such as Ancient Woodland Sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, proximity to dwellings and public usage.
- The intensity of the proposed management and methods to be employed such as harvesting and regeneration methods.
- The scale and significance of the proposed work in relation to the woodland size and sensitivities.
- Regional and National priorities.

6.3.5 WAG will not be offered where an assessment is required to comply with the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, or where such assessment is deemed not to be required or where it is required to comply with, or inform other ERDP grants or schemes.

6.4 Proposed payments for WAG

6.4.1 Under current arrangements, the costs of gathering information are either included within other grants or are specifically funded using Woodland Improvement Grants at 50% of agreed costs. The latter were developed as a GB measure for supporting woodland management activities and have not proved effective in the assessment area. As experience from the Native Woodland Plan Pilot indicates, an increased contribution is required to ensure that woodland owners are have sufficient incentive to become involved in determining the needs of the woodland and understanding how to develop a sustainable balance of objectives.

6.4.2 On this basis, we propose that Woodland Assessment Grant will contribute 80% of the agreed costs of each assessment. We propose to agree costs based on indicative professional day rates for the competencies required and the grant will be a single payment made upon our receipt of the agreed information or report from the assessor. WAG will be paid to the applicant, who will be responsible for the assessor's fee.

Q3. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WAG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

7 WOODLAND MANAGEMENT GRANT

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 The current annual management grant available under WGS aims to maintain the special values of woodland, based on formal designations and public access usage. Whilst this grant has been relatively successful in encouraging permissive access and basic management activities in woodland, the grants have tended to concentrate on selected quantifiable outputs and activities. We propose to remodel the WGS management grant to reflect and complement Defra's proposals for the Entry Level Scheme for farmed land. Woodland Management Grant (WMG) under EWGS will therefore be pitched more towards securing the existing environmental and social public benefits and creating the conditions under which the woodland can continue to deliver benefits into the future, by supporting generic, low key, sustainable practices. We intend that this change will...

- Increase our engagement with woodland owners.
- Reduce the risk of any loss of existing public benefits resulting from a failure to sustain woodlands through simple management practices.
- Develop the basic capacity of woodlands to sustain the delivery of public benefits in the future.

7.1.2 It is important that any woodland management grant proposed under EWGS only rewards woodland owners who choose to manage the woodland in ways that either safeguard existing public benefits or support the provision of additional public benefits. The work done to qualify for the grant must of course exceed that which is required under legislation and the degree of support for this should be linked to the degree to which additional public benefits are provided. This follows the principles behind the proposals for the Agri-environment Entry Level Scheme (ELS).

7.1.3 The intention of the proposed Woodland Management Grant (WMG) is therefore to encourage a realistic level of management activity that safeguards the existing public benefits from woodlands and encourages improvement. The proposals also aim to simplify the application compared with that required for the current grant by dealing at the property level rather than with parts of individual woodlands. It is also proposed to utilise existing means of verifying sustainable woodland management on larger woodland areas to reduce the burden of inspection. As with current grant schemes, WMG agreements will also incorporate associated felling permissions and other EWGS grants to retain the efficiency savings for all parties that this represents.

7.2 Objectives of WMG

7.2.1 The objectives of WMG are:

- To contribute to the additional costs of providing and sustaining more and higher quality public benefits arising from meeting the broad UKFS requirements for sustainable woodland management
- To protect, maintain and increase the area of woodland under sustainable management;
- To identify and address threats to woodland, prevent decline and increase capacity for sustainable management.

7.3 Proposed operation of WMG

7.3.1 We propose that WMG will be available in all regions. Any type of woodland will be eligible and all the woodland on a property must be included in an application. This is to ensure that opportunities to secure the delivery of public benefits from woodlands (including from previously under-managed woodland) are not overlooked. Applicants will be required to sign an agreement to undertake certain low intensity protective and management activities, drawn from the principles underlying sustainable management practice as set out in the UK Forestry Standard.

7.3.2 Activities that are required by legislation would not be eligible for grant. We propose that the range of activities that applicants will be able to select from will be:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| • Access | Action to support good quality permissive public access. Action to maintain the visual amenity along public rights of way and permissive access paths. |
| • Boundaries | Maintaining and repairing fences and walls to control grazing by domestic stock. (Providing that this work is not being funded under ELS) |
| • Cultural heritage | Protecting archaeological and historic features within woodlands and along woodland edges. |
| • Old wood habitat | Appropriate management of woodland around veteran trees. Action to protect deadwood resource. |
| • Open Space Management | Periodic cutting and maintenance of woodland rides and limited creation of new temporary open space for the benefit of biodiversity. Restriction of feeding rides for bird rearing, removing straw litter and other associated materials when not in use. |
| • Soil and ground water protection | The removal of debris and stored materials from the woodland. Preventing fertilisers, fuels, oils and farm sprays from affecting the woodland and entering the soil. Action to limit soil disturbance within the woodland. |
| • Controlling non-native species | Action to reduce or prevent further spread of non-native tree species and other invasive species such as rhododendron and Japanese knotweed. |

8 WOODLAND REGENERATION GRANT

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 Under the current WGS, restocking grants are funded at relatively low levels on the basis that the Felling Regulations may require restocking as a condition of the Felling Licence. The licencing procedure is however limited in its ability to create desirable change through influencing the nature of the restocking. We believe that the current grant support for this activity is insufficiently focussed and only offers adequate encouragement and support to a narrow cross section of the range of regeneration activity in England. We believe that as a result, many of the opportunities for increasing public benefits that present themselves after felling are being missed. We believe it important that support for woodlands should recognise that when felling occurs, the way in which the felled area is regenerated represents a singular opportunity to secure a desirable change.

8.1.2 We propose therefore to offer a Woodland Regeneration Grant (WRG) on the basis of the agreed costs over a five year period and offering varying levels of contribution to those costs, commensurate with the degree of desirable change in the woodland composition.

8.2 Objectives of WRG

8.2.1 The objective of Woodland Regeneration Grant is:

- To support desirable change and an increase in the woodlands capacity for sustainable management arising from timely felling and appropriate regeneration of woodlands

8.3 Proposed operation of WRG

8.3.1 We propose that WRG will be available in all regions but will not be subject to regional variation or discretion given that in most cases, regeneration is not optional. WRG will be available for all woodland areas that have been felled within the requirements of the Felling Regulations and to UKFS requirements. Under EWGS, WRG will normally be withheld from areas that have been felled illegally or where tree removal has been undertaken in unsustainable or insensitive ways.

8.3.2 We propose that conifer restocking would normally require the establishment of 2250 trees per hectare and broadleaved restocking would require 1100 trees or shrubs per hectare. This standard has been retained, not only for silvicultural reasons but also because at these stocking levels, the desired woodland conditions can be created relatively quickly and so ensure that the regeneration process retains a high chance of success to deliver the desirable change and secure the public benefit. Detailed rules on treatment for mixtures and nurse crops will be decided in due course and these will reflect the principle of supporting the desired sustainable change.

8.3.3 As WRG is a cost based grant, it can be applied effectively to regeneration proposals under other management systems such as Continuous Cover, and also the use of natural regeneration techniques.

8.3.4 In all cases in Ancient Woodlands and Ancient Woodland Sites, natural regeneration will be the preferred method of restocking and this will be supported by agreed WRG payments over the required period, which may be longer than five years.

8.3.5 We may, from time to time, agree woodland felling and regeneration proposals that include restoration of other natural land cover types (such as heathland and wetlands). This will be where the evidence is strong that the overall public benefits of doing so are likely to outweigh the benefits that woodland alone might provide. In these cases we will seek to support the transition to the new land cover type by co-ordinating the approval of WRG and appropriate felling consents with the approval of any grant support under Defra's Higher Tier Scheme.

8.4 Proposed payments for WRG

8.4.1 Table 1 below illustrates the proposed rates of contribution to the agreed costs of woodland regeneration. Change options not illustrated would not be accepted on policy grounds.

Table 1 - Proposed restocking rates for Woodland Regeneration Grant

From	To	Rate as % of agreed costs
Conifer plantation	Native species	50
	Broadleaved species	50
	Conifer species	30
Broadleaved plantation	Native species	50
	Broadleaved species	50
Conifer plantation on ancient woodland sites	Native species	80
	Broadleaved species	50
	Conifer species	0
Broadleaved plantation on ancient woodland sites	Native species	80
	Broadleaved species	50
Ancient and other semi-natural woodland	Native species	50

8.4.1 Most contributions are set at 50% of agreed costs. This recognises that there is a balance to be struck between the public and private benefits of woodland management, particularly at the time that felling and regeneration takes place. We propose higher rates of contribution to give greater encouragement and support for priority work to restore Ancient Woodland Sites to native species in accordance with sustainability objectives. In Ancient Semi-natural Woodlands where policies restrict the options, a 50% rate only is proposed as there is no need to incentivise a change.

8.4.2 We propose to offer no support under WRG for the replacement of conifers on Ancient Woodland Sites, as this action would represent a significant lost opportunity to make the priority change to broadleaves on these sites. We propose that the replanting of conifers on other sites will however receive a reduced rate of contribution. This recognises that a change to broadleaves is much less of a priority on these sites and conifer woodlands still have public values particularly in regard to landscape and wildlife habitats.

Q6. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WRG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

9 WOODLAND IMPROVEMENT GRANT

9.1 Introduction

9.1.1 The proposed EWGS Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) is an extension of the current grant of the same name. It is intended to be similar in effect to the Agri-environment Higher Tier scheme proposed by Defra. Currently, WIG contributes 50% of the agreed costs of projects within woodlands to improve the quality and quantity of specific public benefits and can be precisely targeted to address woodland needs. WIG projects may include such things as all-ability access facilities, specific management for species like dormice, or the creation of better management access to isolated woodlands where public benefits would be at risk by failure to manage the woodland sustainably.

9.1.2 The value of the current WIG is that it can be used to address the identified needs and opportunities of a woodland in precise ways based on the costs agreed, ensuring that costs can be weighed against the potential benefits of the work. In addition, exact outputs can be specified and clearly attached to the desired public benefit outcomes. We propose to retain these advantages within the new WIG.

9.1.3 The observed weakness of the current WIG grant lies in its inability (as a simple capital grant) to properly embed the desirable change created by the funded work and so sustain the enhanced public benefits over time. The current grant is also categorised into social, environmental and economic projects and requires multiple applications to meet the balanced range of public benefits required for sustainable management. Under EWGS, we propose to extend the grant's fit with sustainability principles.

9.1.4 We propose therefore that the new WIG will offer not only contributions towards agreed capital investments in woodland to create and enhance public benefits, but also contributions towards agreed supporting investments to secure the public benefits being delivered.

9.1.5 We also propose that the new WIG will accommodate woodland projects that appropriately combine actions for different public benefits to allow a clearer consideration of the full benefit to be delivered. This will reduce the number of individual applications required and provide support for projects that offer improvements in the woodland's total capacity for sustainable management.

9.2 Objective of WIG

9.2.1 The objective of WIG is:

- To support work in woodlands to create, enhance and sustain the social, environmental and economic public benefits that woodlands provide.

9.3 Proposed Operation of WIG

9.3.1 WIG will be paid as one or more contributions towards the agreed costs of the proposed work over a five-year agreement period and will be a discretionary grant operated regionally. When EWGS grants are first introduced in 2005, we propose that WIG will be available at the same rates of contribution in all regions. In due course, regions may choose to vary the contribution rates (from 30% to 100%) and re-focus the eligible activities for WIG in response to the priorities indicated by RFFs, subject to our national business planning processes.

9.3.2 We propose that the eligible projects and activities for WIG support will not be pre-determined but the decision will be responsive to each woodland's potential to deliver social, environmental and economic public benefits. Factors such as the woodland's status, condition, location (in relation to where people live), and the relevance of the proposed work to these factors, will be key to assessing the priority work for WIG funding. In due course, regional priorities emerging from the RFF processes will focus WIG on the preferred projects and activities.

9.3.3 To secure capital investments and ensure that the expected benefits are realised we may require applicants to undertake appropriate maintenance work over an agreed period of time. We will consider WIG applications that propose to enhance, refurbish or secure capital projects previously funded under WGS WIG, particularly where there is a risk that public benefits will be lost through failure to service the original investment.

9.3.4 It is intended that WIG may be combined with Woodland Creation Grants for the installation and upkeep of public access facilities in newly planted woodlands. This support will be available in place of the present Community Woodland Contribution (CWC) currently paid as a flat rate. Support for such facilities through WIG provides a more responsive and focussed support mechanism to ensure the public needs are properly met and funded. Public access provisions under EWGS are detailed further in Section 11.

9.3.5 We may require an application for WIG to be informed by assessments, for which Woodland Assessment Grants may be payable. We anticipate that applications for WIG (and other grants or licences) made within the context of, and appropriate to, an approved management plan will permit swifter approval.

9.4 Proposed payments for WIG

9.4.1 We propose that WIG payments may be agreed as necessary over a 5-year period, in whatever profile best suits the work schedule and objectives of the project. Unless Regions decide otherwise, we propose that the maximum contribution that WIG may make to an individual woodland will be £100,000 and this maximum will include past payments made under WGS WIG. Claims for payment must be submitted in time for payment within the financial year agreed for each payment and we will be introducing a swift amendment procedure for this purpose. Proposed changes to payment years will need to be tested against regional fund availability before we can agree them.

9.4.2 We propose that the rate of contribution under EWGS WIG at its introduction will be 50% of the agreed capital

and supporting investment costs. This represents no initial change to the current rate of support.

Q7. Do you generally support the proposals for the purpose, operation and payment of WIG? If not, please tell us what concerns you and why.

10 WOODLAND CREATION GRANTS

10.1 Introduction

10.1.1 In the light of the recommendations from the Steering Group of the Policy Review of Woodland Creation, we have re-cast the current GB wide grants to develop the proposals for delivery of regional Woodland Creation Grants (WCG) in England. We have aimed to make the grant structure simpler whilst recognising the need to make the grants capable of regional variation, and to provide clarity in the public benefits the planting proposals would deliver.

10.1.2 It is clear that current levels of grant have for some time been delivering the required level of woodland creation and with increasing public benefit delivery, since the introduction of the national scoring system in 2000. We do not intend therefore to significantly change the amount of grant, or the current scoring system, until the emerging regional priorities for this activity indicate that a change is desirable. As with the other proposed grants, regional variation will come through the RFF and national business planning processes. Until these processes have been worked through, the initial WCG will be the same in each region.

10.1.3 Current grants are based on a basic rate with a range of additional contributions to cost for different land types (Better Land Contribution), locations (Community Forest Premium) and priorities for woodland creation, such as public access (Community Woodland Contribution). We propose to restructure the delivery of this range of payments to simplify the grant structure whilst retaining incentives for increased public benefit. This also provides the flexibility within the EWGS framework, for regional incentive targeting, it increases the ease of predicting the grant value of proposals and helps make applications and administration more straightforward.

10.1.4 In developing the WCG proposals, we have considered our experiences of outcomes from previous schemes in the context of a range of desirable woodland types most commonly created in England. We propose that WCG will support these types more appropriately than the current grants do by having appropriate variations in basic parameters such as the permitted proportions of open space, numbers of trees and shrubs per hectare.

10.1.5 As explained at Section 1 (Introduction), pending decisions on the outcome of Lord Haskins' review, it remains uncertain what organisation will be responsible for delivering the EWGS. However, the Government has already accepted that woodland grants in England should be incorporated into a single scheme. Therefore this consultation also covers provision of annual income forgone payments for new woodland planted on agricultural land, the payments for which are currently provided by Defra under the FWPS. These payments are referred to below as Farm Woodland Payments (FWP). However, this is a working title only and may be subject to change. The criteria for, and value of, FWP would be set nationally and we do not envisage regional discretion to vary the eligibility rules and payment rates.

10.2 Objectives for WCG

10.2.1 Support under EWGS for woodland creation will encourage the creation of woodlands where they can generate the greatest public benefits. In particular...

- Creating woodlands near to where people live, particularly within the urban fringe.
- Encouraging the creation of new woodlands for access, recreation and sport.
- Creating appropriately designed woodlands for wildlife, particularly where they can act as protective buffers and link important woodland habitats and other associated natural areas.
- Restoring former industrial land.

10.2.2 These overall objectives will be refined within each region once the RFFs and their associated action plans have been produced.

Q8. Do you consider that the Woodland Creation Grant objectives adequately express the current priorities for grant support for new woodlands? If not, why?

10.3 Proposed operation of WCG

10.3.1 WCG will be available in all regions in 2005 as a competitive grant, operated under a scoring system to select preferred proposals to benefit from the funds available for woodland creation in the region. A proposed change to the current WGS grants is that unimproved land outside Less Favoured Areas will not be eligible for WCG. This change supports the protection of these areas and reduces the risk of their loss.

10.3.2 The main criteria proposed for the EWGS Woodland Creation Grant are shown in Table 2 below. Choice of an appropriate woodland type for the proposed site and location will be an important consideration in the selection of applications for funding.

10.3.3 We propose that the use of natural regeneration or direct seeding for woodland creation will be supported using the same WCG grant and same payment structure. In recognition of the longer timescales required, we will conduct a review of the site at year 5 and agree an appropriate course of action at that point. The courses of action after the review may involve waiting for a further agreed period, in-filling by planting prior to payment of second instalment or mutual agreement to close the contract without penalty or further payment. Deliberate neglect will lead to grant reclaim. We will encourage the appropriate use of natural regeneration for woodland creation but in view of the uncertainty factor, we will scrutinise such proposals very closely before approval.

Table 2 – Woodland Types and eligibility criteria for Woodland Creation Grant

Woodland category	Characteristics	Stems per net hectare required at establishment	Spacing	Grant aided open ground (% of grant aided area)	Grant aided shrub element (% of grant aided area)
Standard	Wood size is 3.0 ha or more, and not one of the other types	2250	Max 2.5m	Up to 20% where fully justified	Max 10%
Small Standard	Wood size is under 3.0 ha and not one of the other types	1100	Max 3.0m	Normally 10%. Up to 20% where fully justified	Max 15%
Native	Native species only and is agreed as an appropriate native type for the site and location	1600 (or as required to create habitats for BAP priority species)	Max 15m	Up to 40% where fully justified	Max 25%
Community	Designed for Public Access and is agreed as an appropriate type for the location	As agreed - Between 1100 and 2250	Max 3.0m	Up to 40% where fully justified	Max 25%
Special Broadleaved	Broadleaved species appropriate for growth at wide spacing	As agreed - minimum 100	Max 10m	Normally 10%. Up to 20% where fully justified	0%

Q9. Do you think that the proposed woodland categories appropriately cover the new aims and priorities of for EWGS support for woodland creation? If not, what do you think has been omitted?

Q10. Do you think the proposed eligibility criteria above are appropriate to the woodland categories? If not, how could they be improved?

10.4 Proposed payments for WCG

10.4.1 To simplify the treatment of wide spaced fast growing broadleaves, we propose to introduce a single rate of grant as shown in Table 3 below. This removes the need for calculations of grants on a pro-rata basis. We propose that the initial grant rates to be offered will be as follows:

Table 3 – Proposed initial WCG grant

	Rate per hectare Broadleaves	Rate per hectare Conifers
Standard, Native and Community woodland categories Woodland establishment	£1800	£1200
Special Broadleaved woodland category Woodland establishment	£700	n/a
Woodland establishment within 5 miles of 100,000 people or within the Community and National Forest areas OR Woodland establishment with agreement to provide for public access and where there is an identified need	£500 Extra	
Woodland establishment meeting both of the above criteria	£1000 Extra	

10.4.1 These proposed EWGS grant rates broadly reflect the current WGS rates with the average value of the Better Land Contribution (BLC) applied. We have done this because BLC applies to the majority of planting in England under WGS and this proposal simplifies the grant structure whilst still providing a realistic base contribution to costs to maintain the amount of planting currently taking place. In addition this proposal will reduce complexity and uncertainty for applicants.

10.4.2 We propose that woodland creation grants will be paid in two instalments. To simplify the current arrangements, where supplements are paid on a different basis to the establishment grant, we will simply pay 80% of the total grant in the first instalment. The remaining 20% will be paid as the second instalment usually 5 years after the first, if all is satisfactory. The obligation period under the contract will normally be 10 years (but see paragraph 11.2 concerning public access provisions). This proposal will greatly simplify the calculation of grants for applicants and assist the forecasting of future spend against national and regional budgets.

10.4.3 For further simplicity, we propose to pay the WCG for the special broadleaved category in one instalment after planting. This category will be eligible for the extra grant payments where it is deemed an appropriate woodland type for the purpose of the additional funds.

Q11. Do you generally support the proposed arrangements for WCG grant payment? Please tell us if anything in the proposals concerns you and why.

10.5 Proposed operation of EWGS Farm Woodland Payment

10.5.1 The EWGS Farm Woodland Payment (FWP) will replace the current FWPS. The decision to bring together establishment grants and annual income forgone payments in a single scheme is the logical next step in a process of integration that began in 1997 with the introduction of a joint application and first claim procedure for the WGS and the FWPS. However, it is proposed that the detailed rules relating to income-forgone payments should remain largely unchanged. We envisage the FWP operating on a national basis, with no regional discretion to vary the annual income foregone payments.

10.5.2 FWP will provide annual payments to offset loss of income as a result of converting agricultural land to woodland with WCG support under EWGS. Agreement holders must undertake to maintain the woodland concerned for 30 years (in the case of mainly broadleaved plantings) and 20 years (in the case of mainly conifer plantings). The minimum total area per application will continue to be 1 hectare per farm business but this need not be planted as a single block.

10.5.3 The main changes proposed to the current FWPS rules (including entry criteria) are as follows:

(i) Upper size limits for applications - the current upper size limits applied to individual applications and to the cumulative effect of multiple applications from a single business (currently 40 hectares in the case of unimproved land and 200 hectares in the case of all eligible land) will be removed. We have concluded that there is no good reason to exclude an application simply because, when considered either singly or in conjunction with previous applications from the same business, it exceeds a certain size threshold. Each case will be judged on its merits.

(ii) Land that forms part of a National Nature Reserve – while there are environmental sensitivities associated with such land, we consider that in conjunction with English Nature we have sufficient powers to prevent inappropriate woodland planting on such areas. There is therefore no need to have a blanket exclusion of such land from the FWP.

Q12. Do you generally support the changes to FWPS proposed above? Please tell us if anything in the proposals concerns you and why.

10.5.4. Summarised below is the outcome of our further consideration of other FWPS eligibility criteria identified in the FC and Defra response to the Report of the Woodland Creation Review Steering Group. We have concluded that these exclusions should continue to apply for the purposes of the FWP. Except in the case of (vi) and (xii), this confirms the initial view expressed in the response to the Report of the Woodland Creation Review Steering Group.

10.5.5 Categories of land excluded:

(i) Non-agricultural land – under Article 31 of the Rural Development Regulation EU co-financing of annual payments is only available for the afforestation of agricultural land.

(ii) Unimproved land outside Less Favoured Areas (LFA) – unimproved land outside LEAs is likely to be of intrinsic environmental value as, by definition, it will include all semi-natural habitat which is in turn almost entirely BAP Priority Habitat. The Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 provide protection against inappropriate afforestation in sensitive areas. There are, however, many small meadows in non-sensitive areas that fall below the indicative size threshold that would automatically trigger a formal determination of whether consent for afforestation is required or not under the Regulations. Bearing in mind that it is a very difficult, costly and long-term process to recover these semi-natural habitats once lost to afforestation or to any other use, we consider that, on balance, the present exclusion should remain.

(iii) Common Land – there are substantial complexities in making provision for income forgone payments in the case of afforestation of common land. These include, among other things, the more or less permanent change of land use and the potentially large number of interested parties.

(iv) Land at a time when it is rented out by the applicant to another person for their exclusive occupation – offsetting payments should go to the person who is actually losing the agricultural income as a result of converting the land concerned to woodland. In the case of land rented out for exclusive occupation, that will be the tenant.

Furthermore, it is the tenant who can best ensure that the undertakings entered into as a condition of entry to the FWP are fulfilled. However, where land is rented out for the exclusive occupation of another person, the tenant of such land would be able to apply subject to obtaining the landlord's consent.

(v) Land resumed from a tenant by means of a contestable notice to quit which was the subject of a counter-notice by the tenant (except where the Agricultural Land Tribunal has consented to the notice to quit on "greater hardship" grounds) or by an incontestable notice to quit where the land was resumed for development purposes – this exclusion should be retained in order to protect the rights of tenants against a landlord resuming land against the tenant's wishes with a view to participating in the scheme.

(vi) Land used primarily to graze horses - in the FC and Defra response to the report of the Woodland Creation Review Steering Group, we acknowledged that many agricultural holdings may have land being grazed primarily by horses but, at that time, came to no conclusion on whether or not the current exclusion of such land from entering the FWPS should be lifted. After further consideration we have concluded that this current exclusion should continue for the FWP. Article 31 of the Rural Development Regulation constrains us to making annual income forgone payments only where agricultural land is being converted to woodland. Under the widely used definition of agriculture contained in the Agriculture Act 1947, land used to breed or keep horses is agricultural land only if it is used for the purpose of a trade or business and either the horses concerned are to be used for food, for their hides or for actually farming, or the land is used as grazing land (i.e. horses are kept there just for the purpose of feeding them, but not for another purpose such as exercise or recreation, when grazing is seen as completely incidental and inevitable). There would be considerable practical difficulty in ensuring that this constraint on the definition of agricultural land when used for horses was observed in respect of applications for FWP.

Furthermore, the keeping of horses is already viewed as diversification into non-agricultural activities for the purposes of the ERDP Rural Enterprise Scheme. Therefore it would be inconsistent to allow land primarily used for the grazing of horses to qualify for agricultural income forgone payments when such land was further diversified into woodland. It would also mean affording different treatment to different types of business involved with horses, since rural businesses that operate solely as stables, stud farms or livery stables would have to remain ineligible from entering land for the FWP. Land used to graze horses – as indeed land used for any other kind of equine activity – would, however, be eligible for the woodland establishment grants outlined at sections 10.3 and 10.4 above, since these are available in respect of both agricultural and non-agricultural land.

10.5.6 Categories of planting excluded

(vii) Planting in existing woodlands (including grazed woodlands) – this exclusion should be retained for the same reasons described in point (i) above. Furthermore, a rationale behind paying income forgone is to encourage the creation of new woodlands.

(viii) Planting for the purpose of agro-forestry – we consider that the potential disadvantages of accommodating agro-forestry under the FWP, in particular the difficulty of coming up with a simple mechanism for adjusting income forgone payments to take account of this without risking significant under or over compensation in certain circumstances, outweigh the advantages. Furthermore, although we are not against the principle of encouraging appropriate agro-forestry, we question whether the FWP is the right mechanism for achieving this.

(ix) Planting of woodlands to be managed wholly or in part for the purpose of producing Christmas trees (other than nurse trees) – where woodland is planted for the purpose of producing Christmas trees, there is a relatively short period between planting and the expected return on the investment. Furthermore, such use involves the removal of the trees before they reach maturity and so would not result in a full development of the woodland and of the consequent social and environmental benefits. Article 31 of the Rural Development Regulation excludes the planting of Christmas trees from EU co-financing.

(x) Planting of land, otherwise eligible, which is being done to meet a requirement under the Forestry Act 1967 – this exclusion should be retained because such planting would take place anyway, without the need for an additional incentive in the form of income forgone payments.

(xi) Planting of woodland to be managed as coppice (unless the Secretary of State has a statement in writing from the appropriate nature conservancy council to the effect that such management will enhance the conservation of wildlife) – as in the case of Christmas trees, there is a relatively short period between planting and financial return on the investment where woodland is planted to be managed as coppice. Article 31 of the Rural Development Regulation excludes EU co-financing of annual income foregone payments for such woodland.

10.5.7 Categories of applicant excluded

(xii) Someone who is not running an agricultural business at the time of application – in the FC and Defra response to the report of the Woodland Creation Review Steering Group we said that we were sympathetic to the idea of lifting this exclusion but needed to consider the matter further. Having done so, we have concluded that the exclusion should remain. We accept that the public benefits will be the same whoever creates the woodland concerned. However, to lift this exclusion would create considerable difficulties in determining whether the application concerned could legitimately be regarded as falling under Article 31 of the Rural Development Regulation. However, as in the case of the FWPS, there will be no requirement for FWP participants to continue to run an agricultural business once they have been accepted into the scheme.

Q13. Do you have any comments on the proposed continuation of the above exclusions from the FWP bearing in mind that the payments are concerned solely with the conversion of agricultural land to woodland? Please indicate clearly to which exclusion(s) your comments refer.

10.6 Proposed payments for FWP

10.6.1 As in the case of the current FWPS, annual income forgone payments will be made over 15 years (for new woodland comprising more than 50% by area of broadleaves) and over 10 years (for new woodland comprising 50% or less by area of broadleaves, or for fast growing broadleaved species such as poplar).

10.6.2 Current payment rates under the FWPS are as follows:

Agricultural Land Category	Non-LFA £/ha/year	LFA (DA) £/ha/year	LFA (SDA) £/ha/year
Arable land	300	230	160
Other improved land	260	200	140
Unimproved land	Ineligible	60	60

Key : LFA = Less Favoured Area, DA = Disadvantaged Area, SDA = Severely Disadvantaged Area.

The payment rates themselves, and possibly the current land use categories, will need to be reviewed in the light of the outcome of the recent CAP reform agreement, in particular the forthcoming introduction of a Single Farm Payment (SFP), once further details about how the latter will operate are known. However, we do not at present envisage regional discretion to vary the income forgone rates.

10.7 WCG and FWP – Appeals

10.7.1 Depending upon what organisation becomes responsible for delivering the EWGS, the appeal arrangements for WCG and FWP participants may need to differ from those currently applying to WGS and FWPS participants. FWPS appeal arrangements, for example, include “an opportunity of appearing before and being heard by a person appointed for the purpose by the appropriate Secretary of State” if a decision is taken to postpone, reduce, withhold or recover payments or to terminate a person’s participation in the Scheme. Possible alternative options include use of independent arbitrators as currently provided for under the WGS and some other ERDP schemes. Certainly, there would be advantages in having a single EWGS appeals procedure and we will be considering this further in the light of subsequent developments.

11 EWGS REQUIREMENTS FOR SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC ACCESS

11.1 The EWGS support for public access mentioned in the previous sections is summarised as follows;

- Under WCG we propose to pay an extra £500 per hectare for the creation of new woodlands where there is an agreement to provide for public access and where there is an identified need.
- Under WIG we propose to contribute (initially 50% of agreed costs until regions decide otherwise) to the development and upkeep of woodland facilities for public access. The WIG will apply to newly planted and existing woodlands.

11.2 We propose that applicants receiving WCG to create new woodland intended for public access must agree to allow that access over the woodland area for 30 years. We have taken this step because almost all of the new public access woodlands currently supported under WGS are broadleaved in character and supported by FWPS. As the current FWPS payments for such woodlands already require a maintenance commitment of 30 years, and we propose to continue this for the FWP, the intention is to secure the public access benefits for the same period. Whilst under this permissive access agreement, the woodland will be eligible for support under WIG for the installation and upkeep of facilities for public access.

11.3 We propose that where WIG payments are being made for public access, we will require the owner to commit to providing that access for a period of between 10, 20 or 30 years. The duration will depend on the level of public funding agreed under each 5 year WIG contract.

We propose:

<u>Total WIG payments</u> <u>Agreed</u>	<u>Access commitment</u> <u>period</u>
Up to £10,000	10 years
Up to £20,000	20 years
Over £20,000	30 years

Q14. Do you generally support the proposed EWGS requirements for support for public access? Please tell us if anything in the proposals concerns you and why.

12 LINKS TO AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES

12.1 EWGS has been designed in the light of Defra' plans for the proposed Entry Level Scheme (ELS) and Higher Tier scheme (HTS). It is proposed that some aspects of woodland creation and management will be supported under these schemes where it is helpful to the overall environmental management of the farm to deal with all the work under one scheme, and where the woodland work fits with the priorities of that scheme.

12.2 It is proposed that environmental stewardship of agricultural land under ELS will include woodland options for low intensity management of woodland rides and boundaries. HTS will also be designed to integrate with, and complement EWGS. The HTS will concentrate on two areas:

- Where woodland establishment or management is an environmental priority and needs to be closely linked to the management of the rest of the farm or holding.
- Trees, small woodlands and scrub features that are outside the scope of EWGS, but which are important in helping to achieve the overall objectives of the HTS.

13 ADMINISTRATION SYSTEMS

13.1 As outlined in section 2, dealing with the context of this consultation, we and Defra are engaged in large projects to modernise administrative systems that will facilitate communications, permit better sharing of information and provide

better support for applicants. At the centre of the FC development is a new database called GLADE, which will be in use in early 2005. GLADE will enable interaction from applicants and agents via the Internet to speed up applications, claims and payments and it will also manage the grant budgets, delivery processes and timetables at both the regional and national levels. This is key to effectively introducing and managing regional variation within the EWGS.

13.2 We will be encouraging and supporting agents and regular customers to increasingly use electronic communications for their business with us, but will continue to accept paper based forms and information where it is more convenient for the applicant to work in this way. An important planned development will be the improvement of the public register of applications for felling and new planting - currently published on the FC website each week. We intend that this register will be able to provide much more information than it does currently, to support our consultation and decision making processes, and also allow applicants to view the administrative progress of their own scheme to reduce uncertainty.

13.3 In order to facilitate swift payment of claims, we propose that all payments will be made by direct transfer of funds by BACS to the applicant's bank account. We propose to make this a requirement for entry.

14 TRANSITION & TIMING

14.1 Until the recommendations of Lord Haskins' Review of Rural Delivery are published and decisions have been taken in the light of these, the transition plans will remain provisional. However, we are mindful that woodland creation plans and the continuation of some management plans require significant forward planning on behalf of woodland owners. Because of this we are already planning how we might move to the new grant scheme in terms of the current seasonal timetables to ensure that we can make applicants are aware of the potential impact on their circumstances. We will announce our provisional transition plans in Autumn 2003.

14.2 We have already identified a set of principles that we will use to guide the development of the transition plans. These are:

- We will honour all existing agreements
- If it is necessary to have any period in which a particular grant is temporarily unavailable for application we will aim to minimise this.
- We will aim to give applicants time to adjust to EWGS, particularly where management grant agreements are due to expire soon after introduction of the new grants.
- We will aim to minimise the bureaucratic burden on applicants and ourselves.

14.3 Subject to EU approval by Autumn 2004, and finalisation of transition plans, we plan to make EWGS grants available for application early in 2005.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
Defra	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
EC	European Commission
EFS	England Forestry Strategy
ELS	Entry Level Scheme
ERDP	England Rural Development Programme
EU	European Union
EWGS	English Woodland Grant Scheme
FC	Forestry Commission
FWP	Farm Woodland Payments
FWPS	Farm Woodland Premium Scheme
GLADE	Grants & Licences Administered Electronically
GB	Great Britain
IT	Information Technology
RDR	Rural Development Regulation
RFF	Regional Forestry Framework
RPA	Rural Payments Agency
SFP	Single Farm Payment
UKFS	United Kingdom Forestry Standard
UKWAS	United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard
WAG	Woodland Assessment Grant
WCG	Woodland Creation Grant
WGS	Woodland Grant Scheme
WIG	Woodland Improvement Grant
WMG	Woodland Management Grant
WPG	Woodland Management Planning Grant
WRG	Woodland Regeneration Grant

CABINET OFFICE CONSULTATION CRITERIA

These criteria are included here for your information.

1. Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.
2. It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.
3. A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.
4. Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and parties.
5. Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.
6. Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.
7. Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation co-ordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.