



Wales Native Woodland Expansion Challenge Fund

Introduction

Native woodlands are those where the majority of trees and shrubs that are native to the site. They are important habitats for many of our native species of plants and animals and they also have a high cultural and landscape value. This is especially true of Ancient Semi-natural woodlands, which have existed in this state for several centuries or more and are the most natural woodlands we have.

Progressive clearance has meant that many of the surviving native woodlands in Wales are small and isolated. This fragmentation restricts the ability of animals and plants to spread and makes the woodlands vulnerable to loss through, felling, over-grazing or changes in the natural environment such as disease or climate change.

The government is committed through Biodiversity Action Plans to reversing the decline of endangered habitats and the Forestry Commission, (FC) takes the lead for woodland habitats. The Wales Native Woodland Expansion Challenge Fund is based on an earlier challenge fund which aimed at creating New Native Woodlands in National Parks. The system is based on the experience gained of running that fund and differs in several important ways.

- **It focuses on expanding and where possible linking together existing native woodlands**
- **It is available throughout Wales**
- **The application process is much simpler than the earlier Challenge fund.**

What is the Grant for?

The grant is for enlarging and where possible linking together existing areas of native woodland. The woodland to be created must comprise site native tree species suited to the soil and site, (see below for *Further information for applicants of Wales Native Woodland Expansion Challenge Fund.*)

The woodland can be created either by natural regeneration or planting or a combination of both. However, an average stocking density of 1,600 stems/hectare will be required within 5 years. Applications should take account of the guidance set out in FC Bulletin 112, *Creating New Native Woodlands* and local site conditions in order to create a woodland that will develop a natural woodland character quickly.

How much money is available?

A total of £1.5 million pounds will be made available over three years.

Up to £0.5m will be allocated to applications that can be claimed by March 2003.

Up to £0.5m will be allocated to applications that can be claimed between April 2003 and March 2004.

The balance will be available between April 2004 and March 2005.

The Challenge payment will be £1500/ha in addition to existing Woodland Grant Scheme, (WGS) establishment grants and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, (FWPS) payments.

How will this Challenge Fund Operate?

The Challenge fund is cash limited and grants will be allocated on a first come, first served basis to applications that meet the criteria below.

Criteria for applications

- The area of new woodland to be created must be in Wales or in the case of farmland, on an agricultural holding registered in Wales.
- Must join directly on to an existing, fully-established, native woodland.
- Must NOT be on land with an existing high conservation value. On unimproved land advice should be sought from the Countryside Council for Wales, (CCW).
- Must not adversely affect sites which have a high landscape or archaeological value.
- Must be on sites capable of growing woodland that would enhance the existing native woodland. This may for example exclude disturbed land where soil conditions would not be able to support the desired range of woodland tree and plant species.

Size requirements

- A minimum area of 0.25ha will apply to each area being established.
- The upper area limit for the Challenge grant will

generally be equivalent to the total area of existing woodland being enlarged or connected except where there are strong landscape or environmental reasons for expanding the woodlands on a larger scale.

- Additional areas would remain eligible for the standard WGS and FWPS grants.

At this point a greater emphasis may be placed on applications that:

- expand woodland onto former woodland sites where a woodland ground flora, such as bluebells, still remain;
- or connect existing woodlands together.

Linkage to existing woodlands

Areas of existing woodland should be fenced to avoid excessive grazing and the new area of woodland should extend as much of the boundary of the existing woodland as practical in order to increase its “core area.” If the existing woodlands are threatened by invasive, exotic species, such as rhododendron, there must be a commitment to carry out work to alleviate these threats within the first 5 years. This work may be grant aidable through the WGS and where the woodland is in the same ownership, the work should be included in the WGS grant application. Where the FC considers that the management of the existing woodlands requires more careful assessment, a *Native Woodland Plan* may be required in order to define the appropriate management.

Consultation

All applications will be subject to the FC’s normal consultation process however, applicants will be expected to carry out consultation in the following cases:

- Applications over 2 ha in National Parks must have a letter of support from the Park Authority.
- Applications outside a National Park and over 10 ha must have a letter of support from the Local Authority.
- Applications on designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, SSSI’s need the written support of CCW.
- Applications on Scheduled Ancient Monuments, SAMs need the written support of CADW.
- Applicants in an existing agri-environment scheme such as Tir Gofal will need to ensure that they have the agreement of their project officers in order to apply.

How do I apply?

If you want to apply you need to read Further information for applicants of *Native Woodland Expansion Challenge Fund* which explains more about the grant. If you are not familiar with the WGS or with woodland planting we strongly recommend that you seek help from somebody with this knowledge and experience. The Challenge Fund grant is intended to enable applicants to seek professional advice and support.

Applications need to be submitted on forms WGS/FWPS 1 and 2 and be clearly marked as of *Native Woodland Expansion Challenge Fund* applications. They should be accompanied by a clearly annotated map as specified in the Guidance Notes. Paper or electronic application forms and Guidance Notes are available on request from FC Area offices in North and South Wales.

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Further information for applicants of Wales Native Woodland Expansion Challenge Fund

Environmental Impact (Forestry) Regulations

Each application will be assessed by the Forestry Commission in order to determine if it is likely to have a significant impact. On large applications or those sensitive sites, the applicant may be required to prepare an Environmental Impact Assessment before the project is considered for grant aid. For more information about this ask for a booklet *Environmental Impact Assessment for Forestry Projects*.

Woodland Types and species

Applications will need to specify the type of native woodlands being created using the Native Woodland Habitat Action Plan types (e.g. Upland Oakwoods) and National Vegetation Classification, (NVC) these categories (e.g. W11) as described in FC Bulletin 112, *Creating New Native Woodlands*. Applications need to explain how this guidance and site conditions has been taken into account in selecting species for planting, for example by including more pioneer species on exposed sites in order to establish woodland conditions quickly. The FC reserve the right to ask for further information about the site, such as photographs or for Forest Research to carry out an independent assessment of the soil and site conditions in order to determine its suitability for the species proposed.

Open space

The aim of the Challenge fund is to create native woodlands with a diverse structure and open space is an important element of this. Up to 20% of grant aidable area may be grant aided as designed Open Ground, (OG) however, this should be identified on a map and located around important features such as crags, habitats, archaeological features, top boundaries or glades which might have a value in terms of recreation, or deer control.

Stocking density

The remaining area should be stocked with a minimum of **1600 stems per ha by year 5**. Planting should not be uniformly at 2.5 metre spacing, instead the trees should be planted irregularly, although a completely random pattern can be difficult to maintain. A clumped planting pattern as described in Bulletin 112 should be used, grouping compatible species together. More sensitive species should be sited carefully and planted in groups in order to improve the chances of survival. We recommend that planting within the clumps should be at an average of 2 metre spacing, leaving around a third of the area as gaps ranging from 5 to 20 metres between clumps. An alternative approach would be to plant all the area at an average of 2 metre spacing, and carry out some respacing work at year 5 to create some gaps in order to diversify the structure.

Contracts will specify a minimum average stocking of 1600 stems per ha by Year 5 and therefore if insufficient planting and or natural regeneration is established by this time, planting will be required in order to avoid repayment of part or all of the grants paid previously.

Methods of establishment

Applications must specify the operations that will be carried out in order to prepare the site and establish the woodland. Applicants will be expected to follow sound practice and even when relying on natural regeneration should consider site preparation, resolving site problems such as soil compaction and ensuring that prolific weed growth is avoided and kept under control where it occurs. For applications relying on natural regeneration, consideration should be given to early planting of some of the species that are less likely to regenerate naturally.

Regeneration of invasive, non-native trees and shrubs, must be removed.

Provenance of planting stock

All planting stock used must be of a **suitable** local provenance as defined in FC Practice note 8, *Using Local Stock for Planting Native Trees and Shrubs*. This defines geographic provenance zones and gives guidance on how factors such as altitude should be taken into account in selecting planting stock. This is very important if material from the immediate zone is unavailable. Documentary evidence of the provenance of planting stock used must be submitted with the first claim for establishment grant. This should be in the form of a *Certificate of Local Provenance* where the stock has been bought from a nursery. Where the stock has been grown from a local seed collection and grown on by the owner or a nursery a certificate may not exist and the evidence may be provided in another form.

Grant types available

The Challenge payment of £1500 / ha will be payable in addition to Better Land Contribution, establishment grant and if appropriate Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, (FWPS.) Applicants will need to specify in the application how they intend to establish the native woodland to achieve an average of **1600 stems/ha**. This can be done by either planting or by Natural Regeneration or a mixture of both however, applicants should be aware that their decision will have an affect the grant aid available to them as illustrated overleaf.

Native Woodland established mainly or entirely by Planting.
Applicants who plant at least 1100 trees per ha in the first year can claim the £1500/ha Challenge grant at the same time as claiming 1st instalment of Planting grant and where appropriate, Better Land Contribution.
At year 5 applicants will be able to claim the remaining 30% of establishment grant providing that an average of 1600 stems /ha are established. If there are less than this, the applicant will be required to plant and establish sufficient trees to secure 1600 stems /ha before the 2nd instalment can be claimed.
Worked example Under 10 ha, planting 1600 stems/ha, Improved Land Year 1 claim £1,500/ha Challenge payment 70% X £1,350/ha Planting Grant Plus £600/ha Better Land Contribution Yr 1 total £3,045/ha Yr 5 claim 30% X £1,350/ha = £405/ha Total WGS Grants = £3,450/ha
In addition FWPS payments will be made annually for 15 years for eligible applications.

Native woodland established using a significant amount of Natural Regeneration.
Applicants who initially plant fewer than 1100 stems per ha will not be eligible for Planting Grant. Instead they will be able to claim the £1500 /ha Challenge grant once any work to secure natural regeneration has been completed. Discretionary Payment will NOT be available for this but they will be able to claim Better Land Contribution where appropriate.
The applicant will be able to claim a Fixed Payment of £525/ha when an average of 1600 stems/ha are established. If this is not the case by Year 5 then the applicant will be required to plant sufficient trees to bring the stocking up to 1600 stems /ha at which time the Fixed Payment can then be claimed.
Worked example Under 10 ha, Improved land, 1600 stems/ha, mainly natural regen Year 1 claim £1,500/ha Challenge payment Plus £600/ha Better Land Contribution Year 1 total £2,100/ha Year 5 claim £525/ha Fixed Payment Total WGS Grants = £2,625/ha
In addition FWPS payments will be made annually for 15 years.

When Will Challenge Funds be allocated?

The Challenge Fund is cash limited and will be allocated on a first come first served basis. This will not be based upon the date an application is first received but on the date that the application meets the Challenge Fund criteria and FC requirements. We will try to assess applications promptly and notify you of any additional information required within 6 weeks or receipt. However, priority will be given to processing applications where the 1st claim for grant will be submitted by 10th March 2003. Grant aid for applications where the 1st claim will be submitted between April 2003 and March 2004 will not be approved until after the grant criteria have been reviewed by an independent panel of experts in April 2003.

Double Funding

It will not be possible for applicants to receive the Challenge Fund payment for planting areas grant aided through the FC Shelterwoods project or where fencing costs are being grant aided on Tir Gofal schemes.