

## FC Grant Support for Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF)

### Purpose

1. This paper aims to:
  - Set out FC England's thoughts and actions on CCF support since the last AFG
  - Seek AFG member's thoughts on our ideas

### Background

2. At the last AFG, members suggested there may be opportunities for greater consistency in the way grants are applied to CCF by FC England staff. Since then we have drafted ideas and consulted with regional G&R Managers
3. Guidance was produced ~2001 regarding CCF support under WGS, using the idea of annualised restocking payments for woodlands that are fully transformed to a CCF system e.g. a 100Ha woodland with average 100 year rotation system would be paid 1Ha per year restocking grant. There was no other CCF specific support
4. To date we have not developed specific EWGS support for CCF, but are aware that regional staff were applying similar principles where appropriate. There have not been significant calls for change, though some CCFG members did draw up some ideas ~2006 and there have been comments that the current WRG support discourages CCF

### Discussion

5. We recognise CCF can in some circumstances help deliver high value public benefits, for example erosion reduction (soil and water resource protection), landscape enhancement, gradual habitat restoration and habitat protection. There is scope to support CCF more actively where it can deliver high public benefit but there are additional costs involved
6. Our general thoughts are that the existing suite of grants can meet CCF support needs, but we need to be clear and consistent in how they could be used (in a similar way to Operations Note 12 which explains the scope of deer management support). We have started to draft an Operations Note (see appendix 1) but please note this is far from finalised and initiated significant debate from our G&R Managers

### Issues

7. We recognise there are a number of general issues and some specific technical grant issues:

#### General Issues

8. There is a common problem that CCF is a catch all phrase for a variety of silvicultural systems. This creates difficulties with communication and potential complexity in grant support to meet the range of likely circumstances
9. We want to encourage CCF in appropriate circumstances for those who can manage such systems effectively (and could adjust grants to suit this), but unfortunately we also have to consider how they could be misdirected. A CCF management plan, evidence that it is being employed and a monitoring system would give us greater confidence that CCF support is appropriate, but this could be perceived as greater burden compared with clearfell systems

### Woodland Planning Grants

10. Support to produce a management plan would not differ whether the woodland is under a CCF system or not, but FC staff would encourage managers to consider alternatives to clearfell systems where we feel it would be beneficial
11. Woodland assessment grant could support stand structure and site assessments, though some may feel this is a silvicultural issue and shouldn't be supported. Care would be required to ensure it still complies with RDPE rules

### Woodland Improvement and Management grants

12. We don't foresee any major problems supporting those activities suggested in the draft Ops Note. The most common operations to support would be infrastructure / thinning operations, monitoring and deer management where there is a net cost. Have the AFG suggestions on other operations we may consider supporting under the CCF banner?

### Woodland Regeneration Grant

13. This is the area where we see the most scope for adjustment in EWGS rules to encourage CCF, but also the grant that offers the most potential challenges. A key suggestion is that we could offer 5 years of WRG compared with the normal 2, on the basis that there should be greater confidence that the work will take place, we think it would offer greater public benefit than clearfell and it linked with our WRG targets (PAWS restoration etc). We imagine a 5 year WRG offer may be quite attractive to many applicants
14. Annualised WRG payments are likely to result in very small payments each year due to the size of many woodlands, which would increase grant administration costs
15. A key problem is always linking the payment to an area of regeneration in the woodland, which would probably be needed to satisfy EU/Paying Agency rules; it also links with our regulatory responsibilities under the Forestry Act. What about existing regeneration - should this just be eligible for WIG/WMG or does this penalise CCF management?
16. What if an estate has a variety of woodland types and objectives, therefore a range of WRG rates – how could this be managed in a simple way?
17. The simplest way to resolve all of this would be to:
  - Woodlands under transformation – simply approve / pay WRG on the basis of the area felled/regenerated
  - Transformed woodlands - approve the expected area of regeneration (normally a consistent amount but may vary a little), then pay WRG at the end of the 5 year based on actual results. This could mean significant expenditure up front for the woodland owner and favour clearfell again

## **Recommendations**

18. AFG Members are invited to discuss the ideas / issues raised in this paper and offer advice on how the FC should proceed

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## Appendix 1 – Draft Operations Note



### English Woodland Grant Scheme

# Draft

## EWGS Support for CCF

- Purpose** This note explains how Forestry Commission England EWGS grants will support continuous cover forestry systems in delivery of high public benefit.
- Context** The majority of our broadleaved woodland is managed under CCF principles. In addition, in a number of areas, CCF offers a management alternative for pre-dominantly coniferous crops in the delivery of high value public benefit. A number of PAW's restoration sites can be sensitively managed through the adoption of CCF principles as appose to restoring through clear-felling. Policy drivers such as the Water Framework Directive and Climate Change mitigation also support systems which address soil and water resource protection.
- Introduction** Continuous cover forestry systems can offer higher public benefits compared with traditional silvicultural systems such as clear felling in some situations. This may include protection of soil and water resources, landscape and biodiversity value as well as production of quality timber. As such the Forestry Commission wants to ensure that Continuous Cover Forestry, where appropriate, is supported and encouraged through the suite of EWGS grant support
- Requirements** In order to justify EWGS support, the Forestry Commission needs to be assured that CCF is an appropriate system for the site, taking account of factors such as species present, tree stability, tree establishment/protection. There should be a management plan in place that communicates this and provides information such as management objectives, silvicultural system, baseline species/size distribution, operational plans and monitoring methods. We would also normally expect evidence that current or proposed management accords with the management plan
- Woodland Planning Grants** Woodland Planning Grant can contribute towards production of these plans in support of our requirements. In addition Woodland Assessment Grant can support the survey work required to establish the baseline information required to inform the plan.
- Woodland Regeneration Grant** Woodlands that are already operating a continuous cover system with multiple age structure can receive an annualised Woodland Regeneration Grant (WRG) over 5 years; otherwise WRG is offered on specific, mapped areas of woodland felling for up to 2 years ahead.

In applying annualised WRG payments, it will be based on a 100 year rotation for broadleaves, 50 years for conifers

Whilst we would normally expect regeneration through natural processes in the longer term, WRG can support supplementary planting to introduce / alter species composition or benefit stand structure as appropriate.

**Woodland Improvement Grant**

Woodland Improvement Grant can support uneconomic thinning operations that help initiate, develop or maintain a CCF system. Situations could include necessary early thinning interventions where crops have lower percentages of higher value material; or undertaking high cost thinning operations on steep ground e.g. cable crane sites. WIG may also support the provision of infrastructure to facilitate the interventions required of CCF system e.g. harvesting routes and loading areas. Other operations may include respacing and cleaning

**Woodland Management Grant**

Woodland Management Grant (WGM) can support the additional ongoing costs associated with CCF systems where they clearly deliver additional public benefit. This may include:

- Uneconomic thinning, cleaning, respacing
- Monitoring
- Squirrel Management
- Deer management
- Deer exclosures

**Further Advice**

The EWGS website [www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs) contains all the information needed to apply for grant support. If you do not have access to the internet, you can request any of the information from your local Forestry Commission office.

We recommend getting professional advice on woodland management and grants. A list of national and regional professional organisations is listed at [www.forestry.gov.uk/england-advice](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-advice). Or available from your local FC office.

**Versions**

Version 1.0 issued XXXXXX