



FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND REPORT

Scottish Government

Consultation on the Future of Forestry in Scotland

The consultation, which closed on the 9th November 2016, stimulated more than 600 responses; consultants are now analysing the comments and will report to Ministers by February 2017. Responses have now been published where authorized by the consultee.

Tree Health

Exempt from publication, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Part 2, Section 35(a) - 'The formulation or development of government policy.'

Woodland Creation - Forestry Grant Scheme

We are now seeing a significant increase in the number and value of applications to the new Forestry Grants Scheme, which opened in April 2015 and is administered by Forestry Commission Scotland. FGS provides support for the creation of new woodland and management of existing forests and is part of Scotland's Rural Development Programme (2014-20). Annually, £36 million has been allocated for the Forestry Grants Scheme with £30 million of this specifically for new planting.

Since opening, almost 1500 FGS applications, worth over £62m have now been submitted, including over 10,500 hectares of applications for woodland creation. Of these over 1,000 worth almost £45m have been approved, including 6800ha of woodland creation. A further £15m of applications including over 3,000 hectares of WC applications are expected to be approved during 2016/17. We are also continuing to see a very significant increase in number of future woodland creation projects being worked up and FCS is currently aware that a further 12,000ha of proposals are in preparation by landowners.

The Brexit vote introduced significant uncertainty for applicants and FCS was unable to award contracts for a 2 month period. However, as a result of SG funding guarantees these short term concerns have been resolved and FGS is operating on business as usual basis.

As a result of the delays following Brexit average application processing times (which include periods when the case is with the applicant) have increased slightly with approval times for woodland creation projects increasing from 16 weeks to 17 weeks on average and 12 weeks to 13 weeks for other FGS applications that don't include a 28 consultation period. Larger and more complex woodland creation projects, particularly those over 500 hectares or involving EIAs can take much longer, but the FGS application process is still typically under 20 weeks.

FC Scotland Report

The Minister has now received the Jim Mackinnon report on improving the forestry approvals process, and is discussing next steps with FCS and SG officials.

Native Woodland

Last year over 2,300 hectares of native woodland were established that made a significant contribution towards our ambitious annual target. We will need to continue to create new native woodlands to deliver on our 10,000 ha per year ambition, our climate change commitments and plans to enhance Scotland's biodiversity.

Work is underway to improve the condition of Scotland's existing native woods, including, critical work on controlling invasive non-native species such as Rhododendron. To date, more than £340,000 of Forestry Grant Scheme funding has been committed to this and since 2011, action on the national forest estate has cleared an area of 5,131 hectares on designated sites. We are making progress but again through continued partnership working more can be achieved.

Increasing the economic contribution of forestry in Scotland

Timber Transport

Work is ongoing to support the sector through the Timber Transport fund. Projects currently underway include road improvements, use of shipping to remove transport from fragile rural networks and exploratory discussions on using rail in the north west of Scotland. Partnerships with landowners, agents, local authorities and Transport Scotland have been essential to ensure maximum value for the expenditure incurred. The Timber Transport Forum have recently prepared a list of potential projects for consideration over the next financial year and beyond.

Sector Skills

FCS is a key partner in the Scottish Enterprise Industry Leadership Group which has developed a skills action plan to encourage more people to consider forestry as a career and increase the skill set within the sector. As part of this initiative, FCS has given firm commitment to support the Forest Machine Operator Training Group in its objective to develop an enhanced viable training course to be piloted in early 2017.

Wider Sector Support

FCS is working with the nursery sector to improve efficiency and productivity; the first meeting with the CONFOR nursery group to discuss resilience was held on 28 October. Representatives from FC England and NRW also attended.

FCS was a partner in the production the latest GB Wood Fibre Supply and Demand report which has been well received. The latest regional industry meetings, also supported by FCS, were well attended with the main topics including the outputs of this Supply and Demand study.

FC Scotland Report

FCS supports the use of timber in construction through Wood for Good and other initiatives. The Glasgow Institute of Architects awards were held on 4 November at which the Wood for Good/FCS best use of Wood Award was presented to Page Park Architects for Dollar Academy. In addition, a FCS funded Wood for Good conference on Custom Build with Timber was delivered in Bristol this month. The event was well attended with RSL's, engineers, architects and developers.

Increase the contribution to Health and Well-being (urban and rural communities)

The Fife Forestry Shared Apprenticeship Project

This Project is supported by FCS, Big Lottery, Fife Council and private industry organisations. It was set up in response to concerns from the industry about an ageing workforce and shortage of new entrants to the sector.

The project will see 6 apprentices employed by Rural Skills Scotland Ltd (RSS) for 16 months, during which time they will be placed with a number of different forestry businesses for around 12 weeks at a time. As well as gaining a range of industry experience the apprentices will work to gain a Level 2 Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in trees and timber, all of which would be delivered in the workplace.

As employers, Rural Skills Scotland will pay the wages of the apprentices but require a small contribution towards training costs from the forestry businesses for the time they are with them.

Green Exercise Partnership

On 11 November Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport Shona Robison opened the new Leaf Room in the Community Garden at Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee.

This was an ambitious project supported by FCS and the Green Exercise Partnership (FCS, SNH and NHS). It provides opportunities for clinicians to take recovery and treatment programmes outdoors, offering shelter and a therapeutic space that can be used all year round as a good example of how the natural environment can promote positive health and well-being.

The leaf room makes the most of the attractive woodland setting and has established a landmark structure in the hospital grounds that also showcases Scottish timber at its best with BSW Timber Ltd supplying the timber.

The Green Exercise Partnership have taken forward a programme entitled 'Greening the NHS Estate' at hospitals and healthcare facilities with the majority of the 14 regional NHS Boards in Scotland.

Communications

The annual Forestry Commission Scotland communications events were held this year

FC Scotland Report

between 12 -28 October. Over 700 staff attended the meetings across 8 dates giving them an opportunity to hear presentations from Jo O'Hara and Simon Hodge, as well as updates from HR and Trade Union representatives.

A Q&A session was held in the early afternoon, providing staff with a forum in which to hear their queries answered by Jo, Simon and a HR representative.

In a change from previous years, a discussion session around Scottish Government consultation on the Future of Forestry was facilitated in the second half of the day, and staff's views on the proposals within the consultation were gathered.

Jo O'Hara
Head of FCS