

English Woodland Grant Scheme

Operations Note 13

1st June 2008

Public access exceptional circumstances

Purpose This note outlines the main criteria against which an EWGS application for public access grant will be judged on the basis of exceptional public access, and how applicants should present their case for consideration by the FC. This note is primarily written for Woodland Management Grant (WMG) applications but may be used for other EWGS grants where appropriate.

Background Grant can be paid for offering public access where there is a demand. Normally a demand for public access is deemed to exist where, at the time of application, there is less than 1 hectare of free public access woodland for every 500 residents within 8km. In exceptional circumstances, access projects that cannot satisfy this general criterion may still be justified subject to FC discretion based on more detailed assessment of need and public support within the community concerned.

Eligibility An application will still need to meet the other eligibility criteria required for the EWGS grant applied for. For example, a property must be certified if over 30Ha and WMG is applied, and the work proposed must exceed the value of the grant. Some or all of the property may qualify on an alternative basis for WMG, e.g. if it is a woodland type important to UKBAP or located in a red squirrel reserve. In these situations it would be expected that any threats or opportunities arising from those alternative eligibility criteria would be fully addressed before any consideration is given to approving exceptional public access circumstances. It is therefore advisable to discuss with FC staff any potential for consideration under exceptional circumstances before putting significant effort into the application.

Exceptional criteria The FC will primarily consider the following criteria when determining whether there are exceptional public access circumstances:

- visitor numbers, and their main origins, to the woodland. This may include fluctuations in demand e.g. population / visitor changes over time e.g. tourists
- types and quality of facilities, whether visitors are being charged and higher rights afforded (e.g. car parks, all weather/ability paths, cycling, horse-riding) including provision for adequate zoning/separation of uses;

- annual costs incurred in the management of the woodlands and associated facilities to provide access for visitors;
- strategic importance for access provision (e.g. critical link in connecting other access routes/areas, or provision for a user group not adequately catered for in the wider locality). This should include Local Authority or Local Access Forum comment on the most appropriate type(s) of access provision to benefit the local community and economy.

Presentation of the case The applicant should present evidence against these criteria, together with any other evidence that may support exceptional circumstances, as supplementary papers to their EWGS 6 application form. We would expect the key elements of this information to be provided on one or two sides of A4. If relevant to the case we will need to be convinced of the reason why we should set aside the policy presumption of only supporting access close to where people live. As with all grant applications we would consider the overall sustainability and cost effectiveness of the proposal (e.g. any impacts on biodiversity, and avoidance of unnecessary work).

FC Decision The Regional Grants & Regulations Manager will consider the merits of the case and inform the applicant of their decision. The decision may be to award grant over some, all or none of the area applied for.

Further Advice The EWGS website 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 available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-advice or from your local FC office.

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Version 1.1 issued 1st June 2008 – note broadened beyond WMG to other EWGS grants and header changed