



**Scottish
Forestry** / **Coilltearachd
na h-Alba**

Technical note on preparing a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

**Interim PDF version
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This is an interim PDF version of the technical note that will be available as HTML pages on the Scottish Forestry website. Please note that this PDF will not be updated after publication. The text on the website should be used for the most current information.

Introduction

A Forestry and Woodland Strategy sets out a Planning Authority's vision, policies and plan for the future of forestry and woodland in its area.

The pages that follow are technical guidance for those in a Planning Authority who are writing a new Forestry and Woodland Strategy or updating an existing one.

If you want to find out about a Planning Authority's vision and plans for the woodlands in its area, please go to its website.

1. Technical guidance to support Planning Authorities

This technical guidance provides information to support Planning Authorities to prepare or update their Forestry and Woodland Strategy (FWS). It is expected that, where available, an up-to-date FWS will inform the Planning Authority's Local Development Plan Evidence Report.

Planning Authorities can seek advice on sustainable forest management and the multiple benefits of forestry in relation to a FWS from their [local Scottish Forestry Conservancy office](#).

What is a Forestry and Woodland Strategy?

A FWS sets out a Planning Authority's vision, policies and plans for the future of forestry and woodland in its area. It should reflect the Scottish Government's approach to sustainable forest management (a term that includes woodland creation and managing existing forests) and delivering multi-benefit forestry that will help to realise a range of social, economic and environmental benefits. The Scottish Government's approach is set out in [Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029](#).

2. The benefits of a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

A FWS can help a Planning Authority realise a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits from the forests and woodlands in its area. These benefits will be experienced by those involved in creating new woodland, managing maturing woodlands, harvesting, transporting, sawmilling and manufacturing timber products, and also those involved in forest-based activities that support physical activity, mental well-being, community development, tourism, education, appreciation of historic sites, and environmental protection.

A FWS can also help deliver wider policies and contribute to significant benefits to Scotland, such as natural flood management, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and people's health and well-being. In particular, FWS have a significant role to play in supporting the delivery of the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan targets for woodland creation.

By helping to inform decisions about creating and managing woodland and developing the local forestry sector, a FWS has a key role to play in maximising these benefits.

By steering woodland creation to the most appropriate locations, a FWS can also help to reduce conflict over proposals and encourage successful grant applications. A range of issues will still need to be considered at the local level, including

community aspirations and concerns. For this reason, during the process to develop a FWS, consideration should also be given to Local Place Plans where they exist.

3. Requirements of a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

A FWS is required under [section A159 of the Town and Country Planning \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#) as amended by the [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#). It can be prepared either singly or jointly in collaboration with other planning authorities.

The legal requirements for a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

The legal requirements for FWS are that it must:

- identify woodlands of high nature conservation value in the planning authority's area, and
- set out the planning authority's policies and proposals in their area, as to—
 - the development of forestry and woodlands,
 - the protection and enhancement of woodlands, in particular those of high nature conservation value,
 - the resilience to climate change of woodlands, again in particular those of high nature conservation value,
 - the expansion of woodlands of a range of types to provide multiple benefits to the physical, cultural, economic, social and environmental characteristics of the area,
 - any other matter which the planning authority considers appropriate.

What is a woodland of high nature conservation value?

Regarding the first legal requirement for a FWS, a 'woodland of high conservation value' can be described as:

- native woodland and scrub as identified by the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland [but note that nativeness is not a requirement for the other categories listed below],
- ancient woodland and ancient semi-natural woodland, including Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and Long-Established woodlands of Plantation Origin (LEPO),
- woodland that is integral to the value of designated or special sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Ramsar sites, and National Nature Reserves (NNRs), and
- wood pasture.

The requirement for a planning authority to set out their policies and proposals is explained further below.

4. Planning Authority policies and proposals for forestry

The legal requirements relating to a Planning Authority’s policies and proposals for forestry are broad in scope and include their development, protection and enhancement, their resilience to climate change, and the expansion of a range of woodland types to provide multiple benefits.

Achieving these outcomes will require both woodland creation and the management of existing woods and forests, and these activities will need to be carried out in line with the [UK Forestry Standard](#) (UKFS) and its [associated guidelines](#).

Local Development Plans (LDP) should be supported and informed by an up-to-date FWS. Further advice on how a FWS should contribute to the LDP process can be found in the Scottish Government’s [Local Development Planning guidance](#).

Reflecting National Planning Framework in a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

[National Planning Framework 4](#) (NPF4) places the global climate emergency and nature crisis at the heart of decision-making in Scotland’s planning system, and forests and woodlands have a crucial role to play in helping to address both and to support a growing economy.

By setting out the Planning Authority’s objectives and policies for future woodland creation and the management of existing forests and woodland in the area, some of the ways in which a FWS can support the implementation of NPF4 policies are illustrated in Table 1. Note, though, that this technical note is intended as guidance for meeting the FWS requirements of the [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) rather than the detail of NPF4.

Table 1: Connection between a FWS and key NPF4 policies

Key NPF4 policies	Connection to FWS
Sustainable places	
Policy 2: Climate mitigation and adaptation	<p>Climate change presents challenges to the forestry practices that will help deliver a FWS. See Improve forest resilience Scottish Forestry</p> <p>Climate mitigation – woodland creation and the management of existing woodlands play an important role in carbon sequestration and mitigating climate change. See Information Note: climate mitigation woodland creation and management Scottish Forestry</p>

	Climate adaptation – new woodlands can be planned for places where they will contribute to adaptation measures such as natural flood management and soil stability. See Factsheet: Climate change and urban forests - Forest Research and Climate change factsheet: Climate change and ecosystem services
Policy 3: Biodiversity	All woodland habitats have biodiversity value and help to support nature networks, and this contribution is enhanced in woodlands of high nature conservation value. See Forestry Supports Scotland's Biodiversity
Policy 4: Natural places	Woodland habitats help to support nature networks and play an important role in providing or linking natural assets of local, regional, national and international importance. See Forest and Woodland - Nature Networks
Policy 6: Forestry, woodland and trees	A FWS should directly support this policy; of particular relevance is the preclusion of development on certain sites, areas and features identified in a FWS. Evidence gathered, including data on existing woodland, is crucial for identifying how a planning authority can deliver the policy outcomes.
Policy 8: Green belts	Forests and woodlands make a distinctive contribution to the landscape in and around settlements and to the people who live in them. See Woods in and Around Towns (WIAT)
Policy 13: Sustainable transport	<p>Accessible, well-managed urban greenspaces, including woods and forests, can help to promote and support active travel options and reduce the need to travel unsustainably.</p> <p>A FWS can also help ensure timber transport is sustainable and minimises impacts on communities. See Introduction to Agreed Routes Map - The Timber Transport Forum</p>
Liveable places	
Policy 14: Design, quality and place	Woodlands can help address four out of six of the NPF4 qualities of successful places – Healthy, Pleasant, Distinctive and Sustainable. See Woods In and Around Towns Scottish Forestry
Policy 15: Local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods	Urban woodlands can be used for a range of activities including for the purposes of sport, leisure, arts and cultural activities, or to support lifelong learning or social interaction. They can also support, safe routes to and from key local infrastructure. See Forestry Supports Scotland's Urban Communities

Policy 20: Blue and green infrastructure	Woodlands are an important component of green infrastructure, contributing to green networks and the benefits they provide, such as the Central Scotland Green Network national development. For rural areas see Imagining the future Forestry and Land Scotland For urban areas, see Climate series part 3 Delivery and in Central Scotland delivery initiatives such as the Clyde , Forth and Fife Climate Forests
Policy 21: Play, recreation and sport	Woodlands provide a place for sports, play and outdoor recreation for people of all ages and abilities. See Welcome to Scotland's forests Forestry and Land Scotland
Policy 22: Flood risk and water management	Woodlands can help manage flood risk to downstream communities and protect and improve the water environment. They are a key consideration in Flood Risk and River Basin Management Plans. See Forestry Supports Scotland's Collaborative Land Management - YouTube
Productive places	
Policy 25: Community Wealth Building	Woodlands and forests can contribute to community wealth building, community benefit delivery, and a well-being economy by supporting new and existing businesses and community woodland initiatives, and the provision of local employment. See Forestry Supports Scotland's Rural Economy and Community Woodland Case Studies — Community Woodlands Association
Policy 26: Business and industry	Wood processing and forestry businesses can play a significant part in the local economy. See the economic impact of forestry in Scotland
Policy 30: Tourism	Woodlands are an environmental asset that affects the resilience of the area's tourism sector. See Tweed Valley Forest Park Forestry and Land Scotland

Reflecting sustainable forest management in a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

Planning authorities (and all other public authorities in Scotland) also have a duty to promote sustainable forest management under Section 2(2) of the [Forestry and Land Management \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) - it is expected this will be reflected in their FWS.

The principles of sustainable forest management as practiced in Scotland are set out here: [What goes in to managing a woodland? | Scottish Forestry](#). In Scotland, permission from Scottish Forestry must be sought for many woodland creation

proposals (see [Permissions for woodland creation | Scottish Forestry](#) / [The woodland creation application process | Scottish Forestry](#)).

5. Typical content of a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

FWS are map-based documents which use spatial data and policy information to:

- Give an overview of the existing woodland in the area,
- Comment on the main issues currently affecting forestry and woodland and those likely to arise in the future,
- Set out the authority’s vision for how woodland and the forestry sector in the area will develop over the period of the development plan and beyond, and
- Identify the policies against which proposals for woodland creation and woodland management will be assessed.

They must meet the requirements for FWS set out in the [legislation](#).

Woodland types in a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

FWS are designed to be broad in scope, including the full range of woodland types across the Planning Authority area. They aim to support the delivery of diverse benefits — including biodiversity, climate resilience, timber production, and community wellbeing — and to contribute to the Scottish Government’s Climate Change Plan target of increasing forest and woodland cover to 21% by 2032.

This reflects the action in [Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029](#) that the Scottish Government will ‘support the creation of a range of types and scales of new forests and woodlands using native and other tree species for a range of purposes, including production of timber.’

The woodland types that an area can support will reflect regional opportunities and constraints such as landscape and climate. The intention should be for the FWS to support all types of woodland as far as possible. Examples of the woodland types that a FWS might use are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of the woodland types that a FWS might use

Used in the Clydeplan Forestry and Woodland Strategy for the Glasgow City Region	Used in the Moray Woodland and Forestry Strategy	Used in the Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy
Native woodlands Mixed woodlands Softwood forests	Mainly conifer woodland cover	Woodland of High Nature Conservation Value

Energy forests Urban woodlands	Mainly broadleaf woodland cover Mixed broadleaf and conifer woodland cover	Woodland of High Nature Conservation Value (expansion zones) Floodplains and areas predicted to flood Riparian woodland Woodland in and Around Towns Other areas with low sensitivity
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Areas for new woodland in a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

Indicative maps in the FWS are used to identify areas according to how easily they could accommodate new woodland – areas that are usually termed “preferred”, “potential” and “sensitive” areas. These areas, and the terms “preferred”, “potential” and “sensitive”, are used to inform decisions on Scottish Government forestry grants

These categories are widely understood as:

- **Preferred land** - has the greatest scope to accommodate the expansion of a range of woodland types and so deliver a wider range of benefits. Preferred areas are likely to have fewer considerations to address.
- **Potential land** – has considerable potential to accommodate future creation of a range of woodland types but with at least one significant consideration to address. The extent to which these can be addressed at the design stage will determine if a woodland creation proposal can be accommodated.
- **Sensitive land** - has limited scope to accommodate further woodland creation because of a combination of considerations. Limited expansion might be possible in these areas but only if it is of a scale and character that can be accommodated without significant negative impacts on those considerations and/or where it would positively enhance features of local interest.

Woodland creation grant applications in any of these areas will need to meet the requirements of the [UK Forestry Standard](#) and Forestry Grant Scheme.

Forestry definitions useful for a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

Other useful definitions related to forestry can be found in the 5th edition of the [UK Forestry Standard](#) and its [associated guidelines](#).

6. Preparing a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

Planning authorities will need to develop a process to prepare their FWS. A staged approach to writing or updating a FWS might be particularly useful – the [local Scottish Forestry Conservancy office](#) will be able to advise.

Typically, the following suggested stages might be followed:

- Stage 1 - Review the current forestry plan/context
- Stage 2 - Scope the FWS
- Stage 3 - Draft the FWS
- Stage 4 - Consult on the draft FWS
- Stage 5 - Finalise the FWS

Spatial data to help prepare a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

GIS-based maps will be invaluable to help visualise the existing and planned woodland in the area, and publicly available datasets will be vital for the planning authority to access, use, modify and share through their own software.

Downloadable data sets relevant to forestry in Scotland are available on the [Scottish Forestry Open Data Portal](#). Useful links from the Open Data Portal include the [Native Woodland Survey of Scotland dataset](#) the [Scottish Forestry Map Viewer](#), and additional forestry open data such as the [National Forest Inventory Scotland 2023](#).

Also available through the Open Data Portal is the [SpatialData Metadata Portal](#). This has key datasets for informing a FWS, such as:

- Land Capability for Forestry
- Land Capability for Agriculture
- Flood Risk Management
- Air quality management
- Local and national nature designations
- Inventories of scheduled monuments and battlefields.

Policy information to help prepare a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

Using policy information to inform the FWS will help it reflect legislative and strategic commitments, in turn helping to identify key drivers for future land use in the area.

The most relevant source of policy information is [Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029](#) which sets out the Scottish Government's 50-year vision and objectives for Scotland's forests and woodland, and six priority areas in order to realise this vision.

Table 3 below sets out key national policies related to forestry. There will be local strategies and policies that should inform the content of the FWS too, in combination helping to create a vision for the area's forests and woodlands.

Table 3: Key national policies related to forestry

Policy information	Description
National Planning Framework 4	Refer to the NPF4 table above.
Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029	The 50-year vision and objectives for Scotland's forests and woodland, and six priority areas that will ensure sustainable forest management to realise this vision.
Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy 2021-2026	Adopts a holistic landscape-based approach towards securing a sustainable balance of land use activities and delivering long-term national priorities, including being a net-zero nation by 2045, using mechanisms such as Regional Land Use Partnerships and Frameworks.
Scotland's 2018-2032 Climate Change Plan	Includes the commitment to have 18,000 hectares of new woodlands created annually to help Scotland reach Net Zero.
Scottish National Adaptation Plan	Highlights the value of forests and woodland as green infrastructure and carbon sinks in helping Scotland adapt to climate change.
Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	Includes the objective to embed nature-positive forestry by 2030, where forests must be managed more sustainably, in particular through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, so that their productivity and resilience are increased.
Scottish Government policy on the control of woodland removal	Gives direction for decisions on woodland removal in Scotland, and explains guiding principles, primarily the strong presumption in favour of protecting Scotland's woodland resources and the role of compensatory planting.
Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement	Land ownership, management and use should deliver a wide range of social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits, and there should be meaningful collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land.
Historic Environment Policy for Scotland	HEPS should be considered whenever a decision will affect the historic environment, so that plans, programmes, policies and strategies, and the allocation of resources, are approached in a way that protects and promotes the historic environment.

Stage 1 - Review the current forestry context

As part of preparing the LDP Evidence Report, the planning authority will need to evaluate whether the previous plan delivered on its intended outcomes and allocations, identify any lessons learnt for the preparation of the new plan, and consider the appropriateness of the previous spatial strategy. Depending on timings,

these findings could contribute to a review of the existing FWS or other extant forestry plan such as an Indicative Forestry Strategy.

Spatial data to assess existing woodland in the plan area

The following national datasets available on the [Scottish Forestry Open Data Portal](#) will help assess the amount of woodland that exists in the plan area, including woodland of high nature conservation value (as stipulated in Section A159(2)(a) of the 1997 Planning Act). The planning authority may hold other useful datasets.

Table 4: Key national datasets

Dataset	What the data identifies
National Forest Inventory	All existing woodland in the plan area.
Native Woodland Survey of Scotland	All native woodland, nearly native woodland and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) in Scotland.
Ancient Woodland Inventory [Note: it is planned for this to be replaced by a Register of Ancient Woodlands]	Woodland recorded as being of semi-natural origin on either the 1750 Roy maps or the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey maps of 1860.

Data to assess the local context for forestry

Information is also available to help assess the local context for forestry. This will highlight if there are trends or factors likely to influence future woodland creation and management in the area - and which the new FWS would need to take account of.

This data might include:

- maps and statistics of recent woodland creation and felling,
- maps of existing forest habitat networks and priority species,
- agreed timber transport routes,
- the accessibility of existing woodland in and around settlements,
- planned infrastructure developments, and,
- climate projections for the area (and associated risks such as increases in flooding, drought, wildfire and urban heating) and planned peatland restoration.

The findings of this review can be used to screen for and possibly scope any appropriate impact assessments the Planning Authority is required to undertake. The findings will also highlight areas where further research, consultation or data collection is needed in order to write the FWS.

Stage 2 - Scope the Forestry and Woodland Strategy

Stage 1 looked at the current context of forestry in the LDP area. Stage 2 considers the possible future context that a FWS will need to address.

This stage uses spatial data and policy information to identify:

- key issues, challenges and considerations likely to influence the future development and management of woodland in the area,
- the types of woodland that require specific consideration for the local context,
- strategic alternatives that might be delivered through the FWS, and
- how the FWS fits with other local plans and strategies for green infrastructure, such as Open Space or Play Sufficiency Strategies.

Useful forestry data for scoping a Forestry and Woodland Strategy

It is for the Planning Authority to decide which information is important for their FWS, but the publicly available forestry datasets will help to show the role that forestry can play in delivering a range of benefits to the area, and the capacity for land in the area to achieve them.

There may also be local authority datasets that are useful, for example on nature networks, settlement buffers, tourism and recreation, peatland restoration and Community Woodland Inventories.

This spatial data will be invaluable to develop indicative maps of future woodland creation areas (or to give detailed descriptions, which might be more appropriate for an island FWS).

Consulting with statutory consultees and key stakeholders will also be useful at this stage to get a fuller understanding of the opportunities and considerations for woodland creation and management that have been identified so far.

This would be a useful stage to scope a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) too. Assessment could begin as soon as different options and alternatives are developed, and considered within the early part of the drafting process. The Scottish Government's [Local Development Planning Guidance](#) sets out how the SEA can be aligned with the preparation of the local development plan.

Stages 3 to 5 - Draft, consult on and finalise the Forestry and Woodland Strategy

Stage 3 - Draft the Forestry and Woodland Strategy

The first draft of the plan might include:

- the preferred objectives and policies for future woodland creation and the management of existing forests and woodland in the area,
- proposals for different woodland types by category in draft maps or detailed descriptions, and,
- reasonable alternatives, to be assessed alongside the preferred options.

This would also be a useful stage to prepare any required impact assessments.

Stage 4 - Consult on the draft Forestry and Woodland Strategy

In preparing a FWS, a planning authority must consult—

- the Scottish Ministers, (*this requirement can be met by consulting the [local Scottish Forestry Conservancy office](#)*)
- such organisations appearing to them to represent those with an interest in
 - the development of forestry and woodlands,
 - the protection and enhancement of woodlands,
 - the resilience to climate change of woodlands and
 - the expansion of woodlands of a range of types to provide multiple benefits to the physical, cultural, economic, social and environmental characteristics of the area,
- such other persons as they consider appropriate.

It is for the Planning Authority to determine how it wishes to consult on the policies, proposals and maps in the draft FWS. The [local Scottish Forestry Conservancy office](#) will be an important key agency to involve, along with others such as NatureScot and Historic Environment Scotland, and forums with an interest in regional land use, such as Regional Land Use and Regional Adaptation Partnerships where active.

Other consultation might include local public meetings to ensure that communities have a chance to input to proposals, talking to community councils, and holding meetings with key stakeholders about particular areas or themes.

Stage 5 - Finalise the Forestry and Woodland Strategy

This stage is to refine the draft strategy to reflect views from the consultation and create a final version.

The FWS should be viewed as a dynamic document, with the underlying data which inform its policies and proposals kept up to date, giving it the capability to adjust to changed circumstances and priorities and so realise the multiple benefits to be gained from forests and woodlands.

It is preferable for the FWS to use high-quality spatial data which Scottish Forestry can publish on its website and use to inform effective and efficient Forestry Grant Scheme decisions.

The LDP cycle has a 10-year review period and an up-to-date FWS will make an invaluable contribution to that.

Scottish Forestry, February 2026