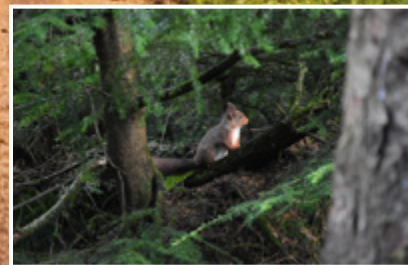
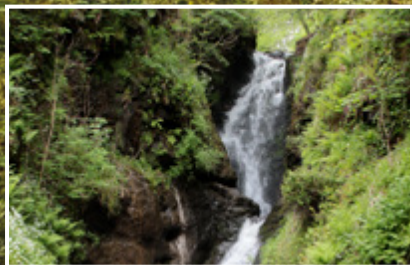


Business Plan 2026-27



An Agency within the Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Gníomhaireacht de chuid na Roinne
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

An Agency wi'in the Depairtment o
**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**



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Chief Executive's Foreword

I am pleased to present the Forest Service Business Plan for 2026–27. The Plan sets out the Agency's priority work areas for the year ahead and has been agreed by our Minister, including the key performance targets.

Forest Service sets targets across its key workstreams, which align with and support the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government, *Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most*. These targets also contribute to the delivery of the DAERA Corporate Plan 2025-2027. In addition, Forest Service plays a significant role in advancing the wider DAERA vision of *"delivering a net zero, nature-positive future while supporting sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities."*

The Climate Change (Carbon Budgets 2023-2037) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 is the statutory framework that underpins the region's first three carbon budgets. The Agency continues to prioritise climate mitigation actions, contributing directly to the delivery of the current Climate Action Plan (CAP). This 2026-2027 Business Plan will support landowners in establishing new woodlands through forestry grant schemes. In addition, during the business year, Forest Service will develop and publish a Tree Action Plan to further accelerate woodland creation and tree planting rates, supporting the achievement of longer-term afforestation objectives and climate mitigation measures.



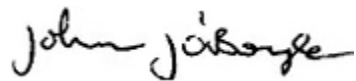
John Joe O'Boyle
Chief Executive, Forest Service

In addition to creating forests, we will contribute to wider Northern Ireland priority climate actions by bringing to the market selected Forest Service sites for the potential development of renewable energy projects. We will continue and extend important delivery of peatland restoration works, including removing self-seeding conifer trees from 400 hectares of open habitat peatland.

We will continue to sustainably manage our forests in line with our responsibilities under the Forestry Act (NI) 2010. In this business year we will develop plans to protect and enhance biodiversity within ancient woodland sites as part of our management planning. The Plan continues our commitment to supply timber to local industry from our sustainably managed forests. This year we will roll-forward the annual timber supply from our forests of 400,000 cubic metres, and an additional 200,000 cubic metres will be offered to the market from prioritised clearance of areas significantly damaged by recent storms. This additional operational work will further support rural jobs and the local economy, generating an estimated £2M increase in income from timber sales towards our operating costs.

Embedding plant health control measures within DAERA's combined Single Portal Inspection Unit for movements into Northern Ireland and providing policy, legislative and technical support. This is central to the delivery of the Business Plan and to protect the high plant health status of Northern Ireland. During 2026-27, we will continue to provide for plant health legislative requirements and also review and undertake contingency plan testing for high-risk plant pests and diseases in co-operation with The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to protect the high plant health status on the island of Ireland.

This Business Plan recognises and sets targets to build the capacity and capability of the Agency's resource to increase resilience and to enable delivery of future programmes associated with the expanding role that forests and woodlands have in contributing to wider society's needs.



John Joe O'Boyle
Chief Executive, Forest Service



1. Who We Are

1.1. Purpose & Structure

Forest Service is an Executive Agency of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). It is subject to the overall direction of ministers and delivers the Department’s policy and legislative responsibilities in relation to forestry and plant health.

Forest Service has operated as an Agency since 1 April 1998 and was further classified as a Non-Financial Public Corporation from 1 April 2020.

The Forest Service Chief Executive is the designated Accounting Officer for the Agency, as appointed by the Principal Accounting Officer, DAERA Permanent Secretary. He is responsible for the Agency’s performance and operational delivery of functions within the policy framework as determined by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. He is also responsible for those functions which fall under the direction and control of the Secretary of State under the Windsor Framework (Implementation) Regulations 2024.



Our Business Plan sets targets within key workstreams which also support the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most and contribute to the DAERA Corporate Plan 2025-2027:

- the NI Executive's Programme for Government - Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most is built around the key missions of People; Planet; Prosperity and includes the key priority of Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment for which DAERA has lead responsibility; and
- the priorities set out within DAERA's Corporate Plan 2025-2027, in particular:

Tackling and responding to Climate Change together in a fair and just way.

Protecting and restoring our terrestrial and marine environment.

Safeguarding animal health and welfare plus plant health.

Implementing the Windsor Framework.

Forest Service contributes to delivery of the overall DAERA vision for

'Delivering a net zero nature positive future, supporting sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities'.

1.2 Forest Service Key Responsibilities and Priorities

Forest Service Key responsibilities 2026-2027, which are reflected in our priority workstreams are to:

- Expand forest cover in Northern Ireland;
- Sustainably manage the Department's forests to produce timber, protect the environment and contribute to climate change mitigation and other ecosystems as well as promoting public access to health, wellbeing and recreational benefits; and
- Ensure a regulatory and inspection programme of official controls to protect the plant health status of the forestry, horticulture and agriculture sectors.

Create Forests

Establish new forests and help mitigate climate change.

Manage Sustainable & Resilient Forests

Manage our forests in line with sustainable forestry guidance and standards

Contribute to NI Priority Climate Actions

Contribute to the UK 2050 net-zero carbon target and Northern Ireland carbon action plan

Supply Timber

Produce wood fibre and supply timber to industry

Support Economic Growth

Develop and enhance forest based tourism and recreation and support the wood processing industry

Protect Plant Health

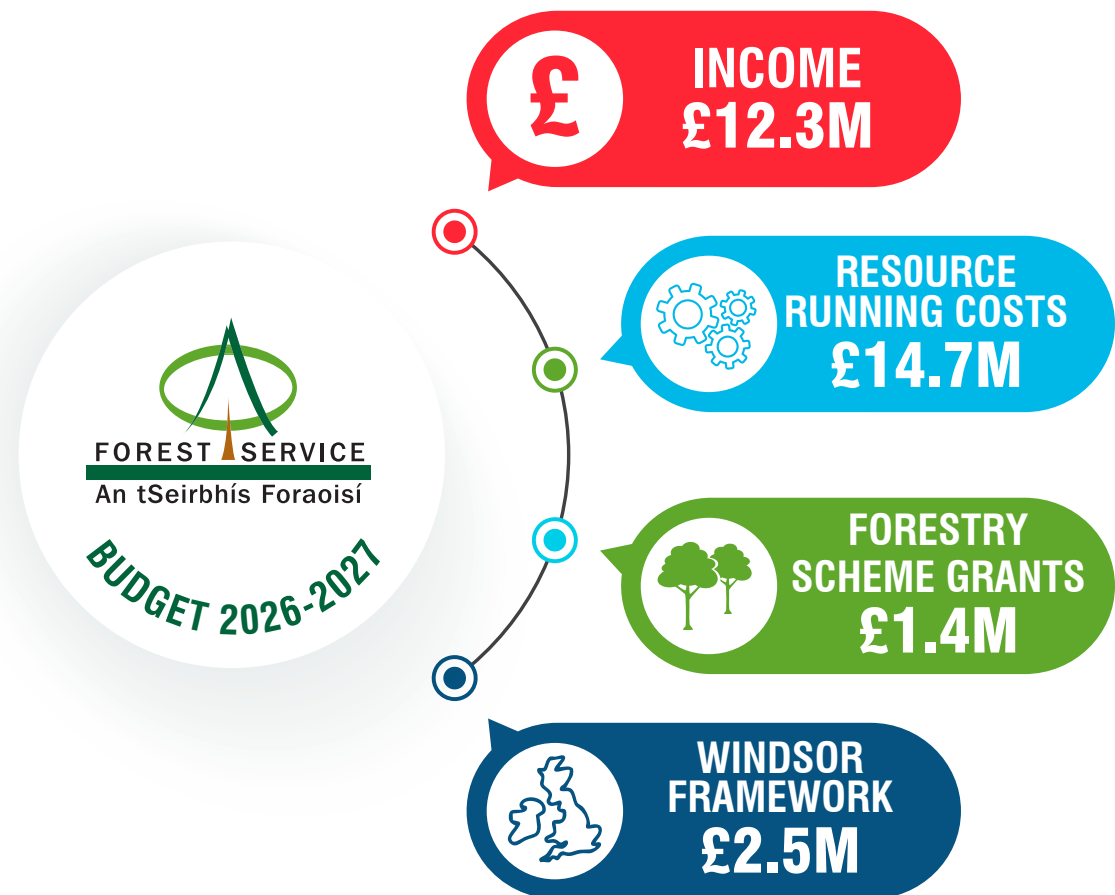
Protect the plant health integrity of 75,000 hectares of forest estate and the wider plant health status of Northern Ireland



2. Our Budget

The Department does not yet have an agreed Budget for 2026-27, the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary has provided contingency planning envelopes (CPEs) to DAERA. In the absence of an Executive agreed Final Budget, interim indicative 2026-27 opening budget allocations were provided by DAERA to Forest Service. Until a final budget is agreed by the Executive, these allocations are subject to change.

In 2026-27 Forest Service will deliver a programme of forestry and plant health activities which are prioritised to align with Departmental priorities and our available resources. The Agency is subsidised from DAERA's budget allocation, including from the ring-fenced HM Treasury funding which is apportioned to the Agency for Windsor Framework related costs. As a Non-Financial Public Corporation, Forest Service holds cash reserves from its income-generating activities to protect from market shocks and underpin investment to deliver strategic plans, opportunities and business priorities.



3. Forest Service Performance Targets

In line with HM Treasury guidance ('Setting Key Targets for Executive Agencies; A Guide'), targets 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 have been assigned as Key Performance Targets (KPTs). The diagram below represents how key and other targets in the Forest Service Business Plan link to delivery of Forest Service priority workstreams.

Priority Delivery Workstreams and Key Performance Targets



4. 2026-27 Business Plan Targets

Forest Service targets have been carefully considered against how best outcomes can be delivered within resources available.

Performance targets for the 2026-27 business year are outlined in the table below. In line with HM Treasury guidance ('Setting Key Targets for Executive Agencies; A Guide'), 6 of the targets have been designated as Key Performance Targets (KPTs).

Create Forests

Target Number	Target	We will achieve it by	Target Date
Target 1 KPT 1	Create at least 600 hectares of new woodland	- enabling the creation of new woodland through forestry grant schemes; - establishing a pilot tree planting project to test effectiveness of riparian buffer zones in protecting water quality within Lough Neagh catchment; - exploring the potential for acquiring land for forestry purposes; and - identifying and verifying new woodland established through other sources.	March 2027
Target 2	Implement updated forestry grant schemes to support an afforestation programme in line with Climate Action Plan commitments.	- establishing the funding mechanism by 30th August 2026 to support the funding of forestry grants for the 26/27 financial year; - commencing the opening of forestry grant schemes by September 2026; and - establishing the funding mechanism by October 2026 to support the funding of forestry grants for the period 2027/28-2032/33.	November 2026

Target Number	Target	We will achieve it by	Target Date
Target 3 KPT 3	Develop and publish a Tree Planting Action Plan to increase woodland creation and tree planting rates to help meet our long-term afforestation and climate targets.	- developing and launching a Tree Planting Action Plan agreed through co-design with stakeholders	July 2026

Manage Sustainable & Resilient Forests

Target Number	Target	We will achieve it by	Target Date
Target 4 KPT 4	We will manage DAERA forests in compliance with the UK Forestry Standard and seek independent verification of their sustainable management.	- holding independent certification that management of Forest Service forests complies with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS); and - developing plans to protect and enhance bio-diversity within ancient woodland sites through an agreed management plan	March 2027

Contribute to NI Priority Climate Actions

Target Number	Target	We will achieve it by	Target Date
Target 5 KPT 5	Remove self-seeding conifer trees from 400 hectares of open habitat peatland identified for restoration.	- surveying and packaging areas identified for treatment evidenced by completed survey records and packaged sites ready for delivery; - delivering peatland restoration works on identified areas, using a combination of operational partners and Forest Service contractors, evidenced by completed restoration works on surveyed and approved sites; and - surveying and mapping treated areas.	March 2027
Target 6 KPT 6	Bring to market selected Forest Service sites for the development of renewable energy generation projects by 31 December 2026.	- securing approvals to develop wind energy projects in selected forests on the Forest Service estate; and - opening a procurement competition for the development of selected Forest Service sites	December 2026

Supply Timber and Support Economic Growth

Target Number	Target	We will achieve it by	Target Date
Target 7	Supply at least 400,000 cubic metres of timber from sustainably managed DAERA forests to customers by:	- operating competitive contracts to supply timber to local industry for wood-processing into added-value products, contributing to the Northern Ireland economy.	March 2027
Target 8	Bring to the market an additional 200,000 cubic metres of timber from forest areas prioritised for clearance following storm damage.	- agreeing sale of additional 200,000 cubic meters with customers from prioritised areas of wind damaged tree crops, marketed as specific additional volume sale lots via long-term contracts and tender sales.	March 2027
Target 9	Achieve an income of at least £13M from all sources.	- generating income of £13M from timber sales and other sources.	March 2027

Protect Plant Health

Target Number	Target	We will achieve it by	Target Date
Target 10	We will protect the high plant health status of Northern Ireland by ensuring delivery of Plant Health Official Controls required under the Windsor Framework and a programme to reduce highest risks of the introduction and spread of plant pests and diseases.	- embedding Plant Health control measures within DAERA's Single Portal Inspection Unit for movements into Northern Ireland and provide support on technical, policy and legislative matters; - providing the final draft Plant Health statutory instrument and accompanying papers for making/laying within Defra agreed timeframe; and - reviewing and revising Plant Health contingency plans and undertake cross-border simulation exercise.	March 2027

Our People: Building Capacity and Capability

Target Number	Target	We will achieve it by	Target Date
Target 11	To deliver the key elements of a graduate trainee forester and forestry apprenticeship recruitment programme	- achieving business case approvals; - delivering the prioritised elements of the graduate and forestry apprentice programme identified by the Resource, Capacity and Capability Committee; and - developing new forestry roles within the current Forest Service grading structure.	March 2027
Target 12	Implement a bespoke advertising campaign to attract a wider pool of candidates to entry grade forestry competitions.	- using social-media and targeted advertising; - re-developing Candidate Information Booklets; and - launching bespoke advertising for a Forest Officer Grade III recruitment competition.	March 2027
Target 13	Implement an updated Employee Engagement Action Plan in collaboration with staff by 31 March 2027.	- development and delivery of a training course development plan, with a particular focus on mentoring and managerial skills development; - ensuring business area leads embed regular and structured team and cross-functional meetings; and - circulating an Engagement Action Plan to business area leads with responsibilities assigned.	March 2027

To find out more about Forest Service's work visit:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/forest-service

Get updates on X: @daera_ni

Forest Service Headquarters
Inishkeen House
Killyhevin
Enniskillen
BT74 4EJ

Email: customer.forests-service@daera-ni.gov.uk

Telephone: 028 6634 3165



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