Small Woodland Grant Scheme Information Booklet 2026/27



Forests for Our Future

Sustainability *at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

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
INVESTORS IN PEOPLE We invest in people Standard

Section	Section Name	Page
1	Introduction	3
2	Legal Basis	5
3	How To Apply	5
4	Eligibility Criteria	6
5	Grant Rates	7
6	Claiming Grant	11
7	Amendments to and withdrawal from Small Woodland Grant Scheme	15
8	Relationship with Other EU Area Based Schemes	17
9	Force Majeure	19
10	Review of Decisions	21
11	Environmental Standards & Regulation	21
12	State Aid Details	27
13	Woodland Carbon Code	27
14	References	28
Annex 1	Forest Block Definition	
Annex 2	Fence Specification	
Annex 3	Forest Service Contact Details	
Annex 4	Forestry Privacy Notice	

1 Introduction to the Guide

The Forests for Our Future programme was launched in 2020 and pledged to plant 18 million trees by 2030 and create 9,000 hectares of new woodland to help our environment and economy. The Small Woodland Grant Scheme is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs and this booklet sets out the general information about the Scheme.

All of the information contained in this publication is intended as a guide to landowners and should not be regarded as a legal interpretation of the Regulations governing the Small Woodland Grant Scheme. Applicants are advised to take independent advice, as necessary, to ensure their interests are looked after. Forest Service do not provide a pre-application site assessment and cannot amend a submitted application.

You must read this Guide before you visit the online application on the DAERA website available at. Forestry Grants Section of the DAERA website This web page also includes a '***How to apply guide***' to help complete your online application.

As the application is online only, you should ensure that you are set up to access DAERA Online Services through the nidirect or Government Gateway in advance of completing the application. Further information is available at the following link: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/how-access-daera-online-services-government-gateway

Forest Policy

The Northern Ireland Forestry Strategy (DARD 2006) re-stated forest policy as:

- A steady expansion of tree cover to increase the many diverse benefits that forests provide; and
- The sustainable management of existing woods and forests.

The Forestry Act 2010 gave the Department modern powers to implement the policy. The Explanatory Notes to the Act explain that modern forestry has developed from policies intended to create a strategic reserve of timber and to maintain a timber supply to something that is "*a complex and multi-functional enterprise, with increasing economic, social and environmental purposes and benefits*". Forestry Grant Schemes provide funding for the delivery of the Forest Strategy in the private sector.

The delivery of forest policy is underpinned by the UK Forest Standard (UKFS) which describes the Government's approach to sustainable forest management. Therefore all forestry work undertaken through the Small Woodland Grant Scheme must meet the requirements of the UKFS and its supporting guidelines.

Support for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme is designed to provide a wide range benefits obtained from ecosystems. These services include: social/health benefits related to public access to forests, particularly those close to settlements; environmental benefits such as carbon capture (sequestration), protection and conservation of biodiversity, improved water quality and flood mitigation; and, economic benefits such as timber/wood production and tourism businesses.

Woodland creation will take place on both agricultural and non-agricultural land, subject to environmental safeguards and taking into account the social, environmental and economic benefits of new woodland. Since farmers are the largest agricultural land-owning group, they are in a unique position to lead woodland creation. However, it will also be possible to support afforestation of land owned by public authorities and non-farming landowners.

2. Legal basis

The legal basis for the Forestry Grant Schemes is Section 17 of the Agriculture Act 2020 which enables the Department to continue to offer financial assistance to existing schemes covered under EU retained framework and are regulated by Commission Regulation (EU) No. 1305/2013, Articles 21-22, 24-26 and under Measure 8. Funding is provided to the maximum permitted under the Commission Regulation. Specific State Aid requirements for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme is specified in the State Aid section at the back of this Information Booklet.

This grant scheme has been notified to the European Commission under Commission Regulation (EU) No. 702/2014 declaring certain categories of aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Article 32, of Commission Regulation (EU) No. 702/2014 will be utilised by the grant scheme and are granted subject to assessment against the detailed conditions of the Regulation and will not exceed the €7.5 million limit per investment project.

3. How To Apply

To apply for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme applicants must complete an online application using the link published on the Departments website. This application phase is now open and will close on 29th January 2027 at 16:00.

Before completing an application you should familiarise yourself with this **Information Booklet,** the **How To Apply Guide** and any Supplementary Scheme Information, before the application round closes. You should fill in the application together with any supplementary documentation, giving all the necessary information requested, and submit it before the application phase deadline closes.

Once the application has been submitted, Forest Service will validate the application against the scheme rules and the Environmental Impact

Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland). Following successful validation, you will receive an email with an **Offer of Scheme Agreement** explaining you have 14 days to log onto DAERA Online Services, check and accept or decline the **Small Woodland Grant Scheme Agreement**. If you do not accept the agreement within 14 days the application will be automatically rejected and a new application is required, before the application deadline closes. It is advisable that you regularly check your email inbox and junk/spam folder for an email with **Offer of Scheme Agreement** in the subject heading.

Do not commence any work until you have accepted the agreement online.

4. Eligibility Criteria

Introduction

The Small Woodland Grant Scheme will support woodland creation on agricultural land and non-agricultural land. It will increase scope for the integration of a woodland component into an existing farm and other businesses and tree planting areas of 0.20 hectares and larger will be eligible (the definition of a forest block is provided at annex 1). This scheme will encourage the creation of new native woodland which will contribute to biodiversity, carbon sequestration, improving air, soil and water quality and improved public amenity value.

Eligibility

Grants are available for land owners, including:

- All farmers
- Landowners and estate owners
- Charitable organisations
- Local Councils (Establishment Grant Only)

An application may be made by the owner (or owners) of the land or by a

tenant with a long term legally defined interest in the land.

Government bodies and agencies are not eligible to apply for Forestry Grant Schemes. The holder (manager) of land owned by Government departments and agencies can apply for an Establishment grant provided the manager is constituted as a private body, charitable organisation or Council. In addition, when agricultural land is converted to woodland annual payments are available to applicants who run an agricultural business.

5. Grant Rates

Grants are paid for the creation of woodland on an area of land which is not already wooded.

Eligible grant support will be provided for:

- Establishment grant:
  Standard area based payment of £2,925/ha covering initial preparation, trees (from a defined list), labour, weeding, maintenance, monitoring and protection. 80% of this grant (£2,340/ha) will be claimed in Year 1 and the remaining 20% (£585/ha) will be claimed in Year 5.

- Annual premia:

  This is an area based payment of £4690 /ha (10 annual payments x £469/ha) for woodland creation on agricultural land. The grant is eligible in Years 1-10. These are payments for income foregone to cover loss of income compared to agricultural production for a maximum period of ten years. The grant rate may be subject to a periodic review.

- Stock fence grant:
  A payment rate of £6/m for new stock fencing. This is based on a standard specification detailed in annex 2. 100% of this grant will be claimed in Year 1. Applications to the Small Woodland Grant Scheme will be assessed competitively and applications where fencing length is deemed excessive are unlikely to be given

approval.

Small Woodland Grant Scheme - Annual Premia

When agricultural land is converted to woodland, annual payments are available for the first 10 years to compensate eligible land owners for agricultural income forgone.

The Small Woodland Grant Scheme - Annual Premia is open to those who, either personally or through a manager, run an agricultural business that includes the land to be converted to woodland. An agricultural business means a business or part of a business consisting in the pursuit of agricultural activities. For these purposes, “agricultural activity” means (i) production, rearing or growing of agricultural products, including harvesting, milking, breeding animals, and keeping animals for farming purposes, (ii) maintaining an agricultural area in a state which makes it suitable for grazing or cultivation without preparatory action going beyond usual agricultural methods and machineries[1].

To be accepted into the Small Woodland Grant Scheme - Annual Premia the land, to be planted, must be in agricultural production for the last three years and must meet all relevant requirements of the UK Forest Standard.

You may be asked by the Department to retrospectively provide evidence that all fields, which Annual Premia has been claimed on, have been in agricultural use for the previous three years prior to grant application submission. If the evidence is not provided the annual premia grant may be reclaimed. If you do not qualify for the Annual Premia you may still apply for the Establishment and or Stock Fence Grant.

Qualifying land must have been in agricultural use for at least 3 years before your application to join the scheme. We may cross-check your application against Integrated Administrative and Control System (IACS) records. “Agricultural use” in this context is defined as ‘agricultural activity’ described above.

[1] Guide to Land Eligibility | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Exclusions from Small Woodland Grant Scheme - Annual Premia

The following types of land are excluded:

- Non-agricultural land, including that used primarily to graze horses not used for agricultural purposes
- Land forming part of a National Nature Reserve
- Common land
- Land where the establishment of woodlands would conflict with or duplicate any previous funding by a public body

You should check that there are no legal or contractual obligations that prevent the planting or long-term management of trees on your land e.g. Environmentally Sensitive Areas. There may also be obligations under other schemes that may affect the eligibility of your land for tree planting e.g. the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS).

Use of the Land receiving Small Woodland Grant Scheme - Annual Premia

Once planted, the land may not be used for any agricultural purpose. You may obtain a non-agricultural income from the land in addition to any forestry income available provided this use is consistent with the aims of the Small Woodland Grant Scheme. Annual payments will be made for 10 years.

Period of Commitment and withdrawing from the Small Woodland Grant Scheme

The Small Woodland Grant Scheme is paid as part of an agreement under which the woodland owner undertakes to maintain the woodland in accordance with good forestry practice and must not fell the woodland for a minimum of 20 years following the first annual payment. If it is found that the woodland is not maintained in accordance with good forestry practice we may recover the establishment grant payments already made with interest. However, the woodland owner will be allowed to thin the woodland in accordance with normal silvicultural practice and remove nurse trees.

Similarly, if the woodland owner wishes to withdraw from this scheme we may also recover establishment grant payments already made with interest. We will not normally recover payments if the woodland continues in existence or if the original agreement holder has died or if there are other exceptional circumstances.

Species Diversity Requirements

To meet Commission Regulation (EU) 807/2014 and the UK Forestry Standard, each new block of proposed woodland creation must have the following proportions by woodland block area –

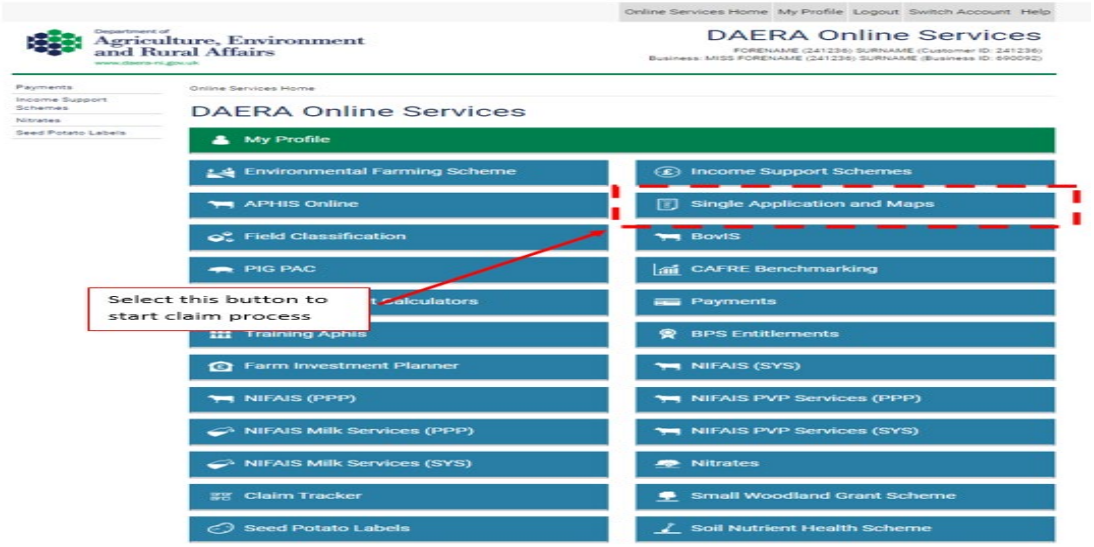
- A minimum of 3 tree species with each species component comprising 10% or more of the area
- 10% open space (e.g. overhead power lines, neighbour set back zones, landscape design).

6. Claiming Grant

Submitting Your Claim

Applicants must claim the grant in line with their agreement document and only once **all** of the work has been completed.

Claims for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme will be made using the DAERA online Single Application Form (SAF) and must be submitted in line with SAF requirements. Search 'DAERA online services' using a web search tool and login, then select 'Single Application and Maps' button. See illustration below from the 2025 version of the DAERA online services system.



You must retain evidence of expenditure to support your claim and may be asked to supply the following documents as part of the claim verification process:

- original itemised invoices
- a copy of cheque(s) or document of equivalent standing e.g an online banking transaction report
- bank statements proving payment by agreement holders to your suppliers.

As soon as we have completed the inspection, we will contact you if you have not met the minimum standards in which case we will tell you of the implications and future processes.

If your claim is approved, your first payment will be made in November or December 2027.

Late Claims

A claim will be considered ‘late’ if it is received by the Department after the specified closing date. In this case penalties apply and your payment will be reduced. You will be given details as part of your agreement. The EU Regulations allow for us to consider cases of force majeure exceptional circumstances as a reason for not submitting or amending your application on time.

Inspections

As part of our claims administration processes, Forest Service Inspectors will inspect a proportion of sites claimed for this grant as required by European Union regulation.

Inspections are based on a combination of:

- Random selection
- Risk selection to ensure we inspect the more complex or high value costs

The inspection/s can take place at any time of year once your claim has been submitted.

Inspections of claims for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme will result in either a recommendation for payment to be made or feedback to you about what remedial work is required, and when it is required to be completed to meet the minimum standards. False or misleading claims will be subject to a Penalty System which may result in reductions and exclusions being applied to your claim.

What we will look for

Forest Service inspectors will check the information you provided in your application and claim for payment. They will also make sure you are meeting the required eligibility requirements incorporating EU regulatory requirements and demonstrating compliance with the UK Forestry Standard.

For example, this will involve:

- checking that the boundaries you have provided for the area of land you are claiming against are correct
- checking that the work has been implemented to the minimum standard required and to verify the quantities claimed for
- All contract terms and conditions are being adhered to

If you fail part or all of your inspection, we will refer to this as a breach and may reduce your funding by the application of a Penalty System. Any reduction in payments will be assessed depending on how serious the breach is.

Our inspections underpin the correct payment of money under the rules of the scheme therefore, it is important that you keep us up to date with any changes to your land.

7. Amendments to and withdrawal from Small Woodland Grant Scheme

Once an application is received the Department cannot permit the applicant to transfer a letter of offer to another landowner or tenant either in part or as a whole project.

On the death of an agreement holder the executors should notify the Department and the Small Woodland Grant Scheme agreement will be terminated. A successor e.g. through inheritance may, within 12 months of the termination of occupation by the previous occupier apply in writing to Forest Service to transfer the original agreement and following the transfer process may assume the position of the original applicant. On completion and return of this form the new owner assumes all the rights, liabilities and obligations in place of the original applicant and his successors. This also applies to subsequent changes of ownership accordingly.

A change of ownership e.g. through sale of land between the date when an application for payment is approved and the date of final payment or period of commitment must be reported to the Forest Service in writing within 12 months from the date of transfer by the original applicant.

A new occupier may, within 12 months of the termination of occupation by the previous occupier apply in writing to Forest Service to transfer the original agreement and following the transfer process may assume the position of the original applicant. On completion and return of this form the new owner assumes all the rights, liabilities and obligations in place of the original applicant and his successors. This also applies to subsequent changes of ownership accordingly.

A satisfactory site inspection carried out by a Forest Service Inspector, a Transfer of Application form (issued by Forest Service) must be completed and returned along with a solicitor's letter confirming the changes, to the Forest Service, by the new owner before he can be eligible to receive any instalment of the grant under the original application.

In the event of a sale or other disposition, the original applicant (and his/her successors) should consider seeking appropriate indemnities to cover their continuing obligations until the new owner completes the Transfer of Application form (and thereby assumes the position of the original applicant from that date).

You should also be aware that conversion of woodland to another type of land use (Deforestation) is subject to the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (as amended). Deforestation may constitute a relevant project, as it might have a significant effect on the environment, and as such, consent for the work is required from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Forest Service.

8. Relationship with other EU Area Based Schemes

Dual Funding

DAERA is required to exclude dual funding under EU Regulations. Forest Service therefore cannot pay grant if the aims of proposed woodland operations conflicts with, or duplicate, any previous public funding such as Agri-Environment Schemes.
If you have had an application approved under one of the Agri-Environment Schemes you should discuss the proposed forestry planting with your local agriculture office at an early stage to ensure that the planting does not conflict with the objectives of these Schemes or constitute dual funding. Any dual funding claims will be subject to the penalty system.

Farm Sustainability Standards

The Farm Sustainability Standards (FSS) are the standard practices expected to be met by businesses receiving support under certain DAERA schemes, including Forestry Grant Schemes. The Standards promote good land management practices and encourage responsible stewardship of natural resources. They came into effect on 1 January 2026 and replaced the previous Cross-Compliance requirements.
The Farm Sustainability Standards are designed to support:

- Protection of the environment;
- Animal, human health and welfare;
- Biosecurity and traceability; and
- Sustainable land management.

The Standards are supported by a series of detailed underpinning requirements that set out the actions and responsibilities expected of claimants.
The Farm Sustainability Standards address matters including:

- **Protection and management of water** - preventing pollution and protecting water quality;
- **Protection of soil and carbon stocks** - promoting sustainable

soil management and preventing degradation;

- **Protection of habitats, biodiversity and landscape features** - maintaining important environmental features and avoiding habitat deterioration;
- **Animal, plant and public health requirements**; and
- **Biosecurity and traceability obligations.**

All applicants to the Small Woodland Grant Scheme must comply with the Farm Sustainability Standards where they are applicable to their business in order to qualify for full payments. The Standards are intended to promote sustainable land management and responsible stewardship and apply to a range of agricultural, environmental and forestry support schemes.

Detailed guidance on the Farm Sustainability Standards, including the underpinning requirements and information on inspections and penalties, is available on the DAERA website https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/farm-sustainability-standards-fss Applications and payments under relevant schemes may be subject to reductions, exclusions or other penalties where a breach of the Standards is identified.

It is important to remember that compliance with the Farm Sustainability Standards does not remove the obligation to comply with all other relevant environmental, forestry, animal health, plant health and welfare legislation. Breaches of statutory requirements may still result in separate enforcement action where appropriate.

General Farm Sustainability Standards Information

The Farm Sustainability Standards apply for the whole calendar year to all land and animals within the business, including owned land, rented land, common grazing land and other land under the claimant's management and control. As the claimant, you are responsible for ensuring that the Standards are met.

Where funding is received under the Small Woodland Grant Scheme or Forestry Expansion Scheme, the land subject to those agreements is also covered by the Farm Sustainability Standards, where applicable.

9. Force Majeure

Force majeure or exceptional circumstances is defined as ‘unusual circumstances, outside the control of the trader, the consequences of which, in spite of the exercise of all due care, could not have been avoided except at the cost of excessive sacrifice’. A landowner may experience a force majeure incident or exceptional circumstance that impacts on his ability to meet the eligibility criteria for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme covered in this booklet. Cases of force majeure are determined against their particular circumstances and on an individual basis, for example, your woodland may have been made ineligible following a gorse/heath fire or affected by a new tree disease that you could not prevent.

You should always notify the Department at the earliest possible opportunity of any force majeure situation that renders a portion of woodland out of use, even if only for a short time.

So, if for reasons of force majeure or exceptional circumstances some, or all, of your land is not available to you, or is ineligible for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme at any time during the year, you should tell us when you submit your claim or within fifteen working days of the date of being in a position to do so. If you do not, and we later discover that the land was taken out of woodland at any time during the year, we may consider that there is an over-declaration of land and apply a penalty to your claim.

For us to consider force majeure or exceptional circumstances, the woodland must be unavailable to you on 15 May in the scheme year or ineligible for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme for at least some part of the calendar year. The land must be able to be returned to woodland use or become eligible for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme. You must provide clear documentation indicating when the land is likely to come back into woodland use.

If your land is ineligible for the Small Woodland Grant Scheme for the whole year, and is removed permanently from woodland use, we will not consider force majeure or exceptional circumstances.

Notifying a Force Majeure event to Forest Service

Should you consider force majeure applies to your application because of any unforeseen event you should contact Grants Branch (full address at annex 3) immediately for advice. You should be aware that, for us to consider a case of force majeure or exceptional circumstances, we need to be told in writing **within 15 days of the date of you being in a position to do so.**

When you tell us of a 'force majeure' you will be asked to complete an FML1 application form[2]. We will look at each request individually and where we agree that force majeure or exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated, we will not normally apply penalties. You will have to prove that, despite taking all reasonable measures to counteract their effects, the force majeure or exceptional circumstances prevented you from meeting your obligations. You must be able to provide information, supported by documentary evidence, of the steps you have taken to prevent or lessen the effect of these circumstances. It is important that you do not wait until the 'Review of Decisions' stage to notify the Department of force majeure or exceptional circumstances, as this will normally be considered to be outside the 15 working day notification period.

[2] https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/force-majeure-and-exceptional-circumstances-fml1

10. Review of Decisions

Under the Review of Decisions procedure, applicants have a right to request a review of a decision made by the Department in relation to their Small Woodland Grant Scheme. The review process is intended to provide applicants with a fair, impartial and transparent assessment of the Department's decision against the framework of EU and National Regulations and Scheme Rules. The aim of the procedure is to ensure the decision made is correct and in line with the appropriate Regulations and Scheme rules.

Detailed information on the Review of Decisions process can be found in the "Guide to Review of Decisions Procedure" which can be viewed on the DAERA website[3].

11. Environmental Standards & Regulation

Introduction

Environmental safeguards are an essential component of the Small Woodland Grant Scheme. The application system uses environmental spatial data to assist applicants to make well designed woodlands that are compliant with standards. On receipt, all applications are assessed to ensure they meet the environmental standards set out in the UK Forestry Standard and the associated guidelines. Your application must also be compliant with Article 6 of Commission Regulation (EU) No 807/2014 which includes the requirement that species selection must consist of:

(i) the exclusive planting of ecologically adapted species and/or species resilient to climate change in the bio- geographical area concerned, which have not been found, through an assessment of impacts, to threaten biodiversity and ecosystem services, or to have a negative impact on human health.

[3] Review of Decisions | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

(ii) a mix of tree species which includes a minimum of three tree species or varieties, with the least abundant making up at least 10% of the area.

Local provenances of approved tree species must be obtained from sources which are in accordance with the Native Woodland Definitions & Guidance booklet.[4]

In keeping the UK Forestry Standard requirement to minimise soil disturbance mechanical ground preparation e.g. creation of new field drains and mounding should not be required. Where agreement holders consider it is necessary for successful establishment of the woodland it will be necessary to seek consent from NIEA if there is a hydrological linkage within 5km of the site to be planted to a watercourse downstream designated as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI).

People

Consideration should be given to involving people in the development of forestry proposals who have a recognisable interest in the proposal or its outcomes. Interested people will include local councils, neighbours, where legal rights including rights of way and any sporting rights are impacted and people who enjoy traditional and cultural uses of the land. To prevent encroachment and isolation, the blocking of light and curtailment of views in relation to dwellings, associated buildings, and roofed farm buildings there are minimum setback distances which are measured using the Departments Geographic Information System.

Setback is most critical when a building is [or will be] surrounded by forest on two or more sides. Consider retaining locally important views from the dwelling by designing open spaces[5] as part of the forest design. Neighbour consultation **must** be done at the pre-planning stage.
Minimum setback distances are:

[4] https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/woodland-definitions-and-guidance.pdf
[5] A maximum of 20% open space is permitted within the woodland. Refer to Annex 1 - Block Definition

- 60 metres minimum setback from all dwellings.
    - Where there is a written agreement from the occupier submitted at the time of the application a 30 metre minimum setback will be accepted.
- 10 metres minimum setback from all other permanent roofed buildings
- No setback is required for temporary buildings e.g timber sheds or kennels.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Proposals for new planting are subject to an assessment in accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (as amended).

These Regulations provide thresholds above which there is a determination of the need for an environmental impact assessment for all afforestation projects (Figure 1). In exceptional cases where the project does not exceed the threshold, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) may still be necessary. This section provides general information is available from the following link: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/environmental-impact-assessments

Figure 1 – Area Thresholds in Accordance with Schedule 2 of the EIA (Forestry) Regulations (NI) 2006 (as amended).

Operation	Threshold where any part of the land is in a sensitive area	Threshold where no part of the land is in a sensitive area
Afforestation	2 hectares where the land is in a National Park or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. No thresholds in other sensitive areas	5 hectares
Deforestation	0.5 hectares where the land is a National Park or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. No thresholds in other sensitive areas	1 hectare

You may view a list of Sensitive Areas on the NIEA website https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/biodiversity-land-and-landscapes/protected-areas

You can also view the protected areas on the following https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/natural-environment-map-viewer

Special Protection Areas and Special areas of Conservation

A European network of wildlife sites known as 'Natura 2000' was established under the Habitats Directive. This network consists of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is required if any part of the project area is considered to have a potential impact on a Natura 2000 Site by being located within, adjacent or upstream to a European Site. It describes the process of gathering information and submitting it to a competent authority (Forest Service) for consideration and evaluation.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 provides protection for ASSIs which represent the best of our wildlife and geological sites. Landowners are obliged to notify the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) of potentially harmful operations planned to take place within an ASSI. Landowners must seek consent from Conservation, Designations and Protection (CDP), NIEA in advance of submitting an application to Forest Service. For access to NIEA's ASSI online consent service see link: ASSI Permissions - Home - Index (daera-ni.gov.uk)

You can view the protected areas on the following https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/natural-environment-map-viewer

Biodiversity features

Important biodiversity features such as watercourses, lakes, hedgerows and unimproved species rich grasslands may not always be designated. Project proposals must take biodiversity and cultural features into consideration and adherence to the UK Forestry Standard and the associated guidelines will be a pre-requisite for any application.

Historic monuments

Landowners have a statutory obligation under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995 to protect any scheduled ancient monuments and historic buildings within the site boundary. Inappropriate tree planting may have a negative impact on the historic environment. No tree planting must take place within 20m from the edge of a Scheduled Zone. Note a maximum of 20% of the woodland block area can be used for open space and this can be used to protect archaeological features. Prior to submitting your online application you must notify Historic Environment Division (HED) https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/contacts/historic-environment-contacts to discuss your proposal in full detail as you may require written consent on behalf of HED. Similar arrangements apply to unscheduled sites where their location has been identified and to any area of your proposal that is included on the register

of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historic Interest[6]. This pre-application work will take several weeks, however it will help streamline the Small Woodland Grant Scheme application assessment and may also prevent the application from being rejected.

You can view historic environment features on the Department for Communities website https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/services/historic-environment-map-viewer

Powerlines

Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIE Networks) owns the electricity transmission and distribution network in Northern Ireland and their approach taken towards woodlands is explained on their website https://www.nienetworks.co.uk/help-advice/wayleaves/wayleaves

You are advised to contact NIE Networks as early as possible because a period of four weeks is normally required to process a request for a wayleave agreement. NIE Networks can be contacted on 03457 643 643 and other contact details are given in the link below

http://www.nienetworks.co.uk/Contact-Us

Any application for funding must show how the woodland proposal demonstrates sustainable forest management. If there is a power line within your site or sufficiently close to your boundary where newly planted trees could have a potential impact on the line, you must inform Northern Ireland Electricity of your plans in writing before submitting an application. This allows applicants to take account of future line clearance requirements within their proposal and design planting which is sustainable e.g. using open ground where appropriate or excluding areas from the scheme and continuing to farm them. Where line clearance requirements conflict with sustainable forest management, support is not available.

6 https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/historic-parks-gardens-and-demesnes

12. State Aid Details

Publication and Information (Article 9 of Commission Regulation (EU) 651/2013

From 1 July 2016 information on each individual award exceeding €500,000 will be published on a comprehensive State aid website**.**

De Minimis Aid

Where aid is not paid in accordance with the Small Woodland Grant Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2020 – SA.110536. It will be paid in accordance with de minimis Regulation (EU) 1407/2013 [Official Journal, L 352, pages 1-8, 24.12.2013

13. Woodland Carbon Code

The Woodland Carbon Code is the quality assurance standard for UK woodland creation projects which address climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

It empowers landowners, organisations and businesses to address climate change by creating and supporting woodland projects across the UK.

Backed by government, the forest industry and carbon market experts, the Woodland Carbon Code provides independently verified carbon units which landowners can use to generate income and organisations and companies can use to offset their emissions.

The code is delivered by Scottish Forestry on behalf of the Forestry Commission, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Forest Service.

To find out more, visit www.woodlandcarboncode.org.uk

14. References

- Forestry Act (Northern Ireland) 2010
  www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2010/10/contents

- Northern Ireland Forestry
  www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/ni-forestry-strategy-sustainable-growth

- The UK Forestry Standard, Government's approach to sustainable forestry (Forest Commission, Forest Service, 5th Edition 2023). The UK Forestry Standard (forestresearch.gov.uk):
  ISBN: 978-1-83915-021-0

- Agricultural & Environmental Schemes Details Agricultural & Environmental Scheme Details | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

- UK Plant Health Risk Register
  https://planthealthportal.defra.gov.uk/pests-and-diseases/uk-plant-health-risk-register/

Annex 1 Woodland Block Definition

Item	Dimension
Minimum block size	0.20ha
Minimum block width	10m

See acceptable examples below to help illustrate minimum block definitions:





An individual forest block will be defined by a natural or man-made feature, such as a watercourse over two metres in width, a public road categorised as motorway or A, B or C- class, or where a woodland is surrounded by land under a different land-use. The block itself may contain unclassified roads, forest roads and tracks, streams which can be easily crossed, hedges, stone walls and fences and will be under a single ownership.

The minimum integral open space is 10% of an individual block area, although this can be increased up to a maximum of 20%. Areas of open space must not exceed 0.5 hectare and must be bordered on at least three sides by trees or be unplanted linear features such as set-backs associated with buildings, forest roads, wayleaves, firebreaks and watercourses. Unplanted strips intended for access to facilitate hedge or drain maintenance are not classed as open space where they are less than 5 metres wide.

Annex 2 Fencing Specification and maximum support amounts

Stock Proof Fencing – [maximum support amount £6.00 per metre]

- All remnant fence material must be removed before erecting the 'Stock- proof fencing'.
- New materials must be used for 'Stock-proof fencing'.
- The fence must be erected to BS 1722-2:2020. Bespoke stock-proof fencing systems may be acceptable provided they meet the relevant British standards and are of an equal or higher specification than the standard specification.
- The minimum standard for 'Stock-proof fencing' is galvanised woven wire and three strands line wire (two above the woven wire and one below) or five strands line wire.
- The overall height of the fence must be at least 1.20 m from the ground to the top wire.
- Straining posts must be equivalent in strength and durability to 125 mm top diameter round timber or 125 mm x 125 mm sawn timbers.
- Straining posts must be set at centres not exceeding 150 m or at each change in direction or gradient.
- Struts must be equivalent in strength and durability to 75 mm top diameter round timber or 75 mm x 75 mm sawn timber.
- Intermediate posts must be equivalent in strength and durability to 75 mm top diameter round timber or 75 mm x 75 mm sawn timber and set at centres not exceeding 3.00 m.
- Intermediate wooden posts must be at least 1.83 m long.
- All posts must be free of bark.
- Posts must have a potential minimum 15-year life, clearly indicated on manufacturer's literature/invoice or on application of a subsequent treatment again clearly indicated on manufacturer's literature/invoice. Where wooden posts have been treated with a preservative, this must have been applied by the manufacturer.
- Use strands of galvanised 4mm mild plain steel wire or 2.5mm barbed wire.
- The 'Stock-proof fencing' must be properly strained and secured to posts with galvanised staples or appropriate fastenings (such as galvanised wire or bespoke fasteners).
- Minimum length of new stock fencing is 1m.

Annex 3 Forest Service Contact Details

Public office opening hours are 9.00 am – 12.30 pm and 1.30 pm – 4.00 pm each working day, except where changes are notified.

The Forest Service Grants Branch customer number is: 028 6634 3145

Email: grants.forestservice@daera-ni.gov.uk

Forest Service Headquarters
Grants Branch
Inishkeen House
Killyhevlin
Enniskillen
Co. Fermanagh
BT74 4EJ

If you have a disability which impairs you applying for this grant scheme, the Afforestation Grants team at the contact details above, above would be pleased to assist, explaining the contents of the Information Booklet

Annex 4 Forestry Privacy Notice

The Department (DAERA) takes data protection, freedom of information and environmental information issues seriously. It takes care to ensure that any personal information received from you is dealt with in a way which complies with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (2016). This means that any personal information you supply will be processed principally for the purpose for which it has been provided. However, the Department is under a duty to protect the public funds it administers, and to this end may use the information you have provided for this purpose.

A full copy of the DAERA Privacy Statement can be found here on the Departments website *https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/daera-privacy-statement* .

DAERA, Forest Service – November 2026