

# Waterfoot Bridge, Cumbria

## Key facts

Location: **Waterfoot Bridge, Cumbria**

No. of hectares: **22 (54 acres)**

No. of trees planted: **33,400 conifers and 5,800 broadleaves**

Species range: **Conifers - scots pine, sitka spruce, douglas fir, western red cedar. Broadleaves - birch, oak, rowan, hazel, juniper, yew, sycamore, aspen**

Grant applied for: **Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grant**

Planting time: **Winter 2016**



'The Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grant supported our objectives with the woodland and provided useful funding. Our forestry advisor, Mike Smith of Longbow Forestry, was instrumental in the success of the grant and consultation with all relevant stakeholders.'

Max and Guy Irving are the third generation of Irving's to work in their family business, 'Irving & Sons Timber Merchants'. Established by their grandfather in 1954, the sawmill and yard in Cumbria now covers around five acres and provides employment for 30 full-time staff. The most recent investment by the business has been the introduction of an advanced biomass production facility providing dried wood chip for the energy market.

We spoke to Max to find out more about a new 22 hectare woodland the family have planted at Waterfoot Bridge. Max explained the main reason to plant the woodland was to expand the long-term timber supply to the mill. This will produce a financial return which allows the woodland to be managed maintaining its condition. Max said:

'The woodland is within 20 miles of the sawmill which requires conifer timber for the production of fencing and pallet products. The site had two existing woodlands which we wanted to join together by planting the upland grazing land which was not being made use of, or reaching its potential.'

The site is also home to red squirrels which played an important part in deciding how to establish the woodland, when to fell, what to fell, and what species to replant with. In recent years Cumbria has also had a series of floods which greatly affected the area and the objective of planting more trees would help to alleviate flooding to the nearby village of Staveley.

### Grant aid is available to support the purchase and planting of trees and their protection, for example with fencing.

To create a woodland similar to Waterfoot Bridge - planting 39,200 trees across 22 hectares using the Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grant, you could receive grant aid in the ranges below.

The ranges reflect different types of tree protection, i.e. fences or tubes, and other optional items you may apply for.

- **£50,176 – £149,600 (£1.28** per tree and up to a total of **£6,800** per ha).
- **£44,000** over 10 years in maintenance payments (**£200** per ha each year for 10 years).

Max's family have planted nearly 40,000 trees on the site, including the past few years beat ups ('beat ups' is where the landowner replaces trees which have died in the first few years of planting, which is funded by the maintenance payment mentioned later). They wanted to plant as many commercial conifers as possible while having a diverse mix of species.

'We planted approximately 60% sitka spruce (improved stock), 35% douglas fir (beat up with some western red cedar) and 5% scots pine. We originally harvested larch from the site but with the threat of Phytophthora ramorum we have restocked this area with mainly douglas fir and a small percentage of western red cedar. We are also noticing some sitka spruce regeneration coming through, now the deer have been fenced off.'

Max and his family recognise the importance of planting the right tree in the right place, so their forestry advisor Mike mapped out the terrain, dug soil pits and arranged for soil chemical analysis.

'We feel we have been sympathetic to the landscape and have, for example, reduced planting and increased the open ground near watercourses.'

Max described how a woodland with trees of different ages, which is therefore harvested at different times, financially supports itself, whilst having additional environmental and social benefits throughout the life of the woodland. The stocked area of the woodland could produce upwards of 10,000 tonnes of timber for the fencing, pallet, pulp and energy markets. At current prices of £30 to £40 per tonne standing\*, this represents considerable income from markets which are all local to the Lake District.

'Along the way the woodland will offer direct rural employment to foresters, harvesting contractors, timber hauliers as well as indirect employment to the wider community. Kentmere and Staveley is a popular area for walkers and mountain bikers, and I hope the woodland will be of benefit to these users.'

It's not just the local residents who will benefit from the woodland, as plans for improving habitat for red squirrels and ways to discourage grey squirrels are part of its management. The family are also currently looking at installing several leaky woody dams to help control the flow of water from the woodland and so reduce downstream flood risk.

Despite these benefits, Max and his family still found there were a lot of people who needed to be convinced that planting trees was a good idea and the benefits woodlands offer.

The idea of commercial forestry is not always appealing to local stakeholders, and it often does not look attractive when timber harvesting is in operation. I would personally say that the wider environmental benefits, particularly its role in reducing flooding in the locality, played a bigger part in the new woodland creation proposal being approved, rather than the need to expand our productive forests in Cumbria.'

\*Based on prices March 2020, and the 'Timber Price Indices - data to September 2019' [www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/timber-statistics/timber-price-indices/](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/timber-statistics/timber-price-indices/)

'Other challenges included a very dry spring once the trees were planted which meant there were several failures due to drought. There have also been sightings of deer and sheep that had got through the deer fence which caused some damage to newly planted trees. 'We have placed signs on the deer gates along the footpath to remind users to keep the gates closed'.

There have been a couple of years of bracken control, too, which was needed to get the trees established, and tree health and pests were a major consideration when deciding which trees to plant and which species to restock with.

Despite these challenges, Max is keen that people should be encouraged to plant more trees. 'We live in an area where trees make up our landscape, but we should not take it for granted and we need to increase our forest cover as there are a wide range of benefits. I think there needs to be more publicity on the benefits of planting trees for timber.'

With the introduction of the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme in 2024, and the need to respond to the climate change emergency, there is a real opportunity for the agricultural industry to take advantage of the generous woodland creation grants which are currently available to plant more trees now. This was supported by a statement from forestry minister Zac Goldsmith in November 2019 who said:

'There is no need for concern about how woodland created now will be treated under ELM in the future, and certainly no reason to delay tree planting.'

In addition to the Woodland Creation Grant, landowners such as Max who create a woodland under the Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grant, can then be invited to apply for the Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Maintenance Payment. This offers £200 per hectare each year for 10 years and allows you to maximise the woodland's potential.

Max's final word of advice to any aspiring woodland owner would be to employ a forestry advisor as they will be up to date on what can be achieved and what grants are available that are suited to the objectives for the wood. They will also make establishing the woodland easier and have a good working relationship with your local Forestry Commission Woodland Officer. Communication between all parties is vital in creating a woodland that is right for the landowner, the local community and the land.



Find out how we can support you to plant trees on your land and the funding that is available to help.

[gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission](https://gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission)

