

# England Woodland Creation Offer Grant Manual

## Purpose

This Grant Manual contains guidance to applicants on the England Woodland Creation Offer.

## Change log

For a revision history of previous versions of this Manual, please see Appendix 7: Change Log.

| <b>Version</b> | <b>Publication Date</b> | <b>Key Changes</b>  |
|----------------|-------------------------|---|
| 3.8            | 18 July 2024            | Section 3.2.8 Updated to replace Basic Payment Scheme with delinked payments<br>Section 3.5 Business viability guidance updated<br>Section 7.7 Force majeure updated to allow 40 working days to invoke |

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# 1 Introduction

This Grant Manual explains how the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) works and what you need to do to apply. It also explains the requirements and processes that you must follow if your application is successful.

Further detail is contained in 5 appendices to this Grant Manual (available at the [England Woodland Creation Offer application form webpage](#)):

- Appendix 1: Standard cost items
- Appendix 2: Design guide
- Appendix 3: Consents guide
- Appendix 4: Common land and shared grazing
- Appendix 5: Natural colonisation guide
- Appendix 6: Agreement amendments and changes of ownership (successions) and management
- Appendix 7: EWCO Manual Change log

## 1.1 England Woodland Creation Offer

EWCO supports the establishment of new woodlands and is administered by the Forestry Commission (FC). It is funded by the Exchequer through the Nature for Climate Fund, to support projects that will help us achieve Net Zero by 2050, as well as helping nature recovery and delivering other objectives in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#).

The main priorities for EWCO are:

- combating climate change by creating new woodlands that store carbon
- contributing to nature recovery by creating new woodland habitat
- improving water quality
- reducing flood risk
- providing climate change mitigation by cooling watercourses
- creating woodlands that are close to people
- increasing and improving recreational access in new woodland
- encouraging ammonia capture to protect sensitive sites

EWCO will support woodland creation until financial year 2024 to 2025. It aims to support the creation of 11,000 hectares of new woodland by financial year 2024 to 2025. EWCO will lead into our future environmental schemes from 2024. The Sustainable Farming Incentive, Enhanced Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery Schemes will provide support for publicly-funded woodland creation, as set out in the government's Agricultural Transition Plan.

EWCO offers support for woodland establishment, either through planting or natural colonisation, through payments towards the capital items and activities required to create new woodland. EWCO also includes 15 years of annual Maintenance Payments to help establish the young trees once the capital works are complete. Grant recipients must maintain the young woodland for a total of 15 years after the last capital works are complete. The EWCO Grant is conditional on the proposed woodland meeting the relevant requirements and guidelines of the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS), which sets out the government's approach to sustainable forestry in the UK.

If your application is eligible and successful, your Grant could include up to 5 elements:

1. Support for the **capital items and activities** to establish new woodland.
2. **Annual Maintenance Payments** for 15 years.
3. Contributions (full costs in the case of infrastructure for recreation) towards the **actual costs of installing infrastructure** to either enable the establishment and future management of the woodland, or to provide or improve recreational access.
4. Optional **Additional Contributions** where the design of the woodland and its location will deliver specific public benefits. You can apply for multiple Additional Contributions – the design requirements for the Additional Contributions require that you exceed the minimum requirements and guidelines of UKFS.
5. An optional **Low Sensitivity Land Payment** where the proposal falls within a low sensitivity area for woodland creation.

From May 2023, HS2 funding for woodland creation will be delivered via EWCO. Applications to EWCO within the 25-mile zone of the HS2 Phase One route will be identified and administered by the Forestry Commission. Those applications that are planting woodland that meets the design requirements for the Nature Recovery Additional Contribution will be earmarked to receive funding from HS2 Ltd. HS2 Ltd will cover the costs of all capital items for tree planting and maintenance works, whilst EWCO will fund any Additional Contributions and the Low Sensitivity Land Payment, where applicable. Applicants will be notified through their EWCO agreement offer and will have the option to opt out of receiving funding from HS2 Ltd if desired.

## 1.2 Customer and Land registration

You must be registered on [Rural Payments](#) and have a Single Business Identifier (SBI) before you can apply to EWCO. Please note, you do not need to be a business to register. EWCO payments will be made to the payee recorded in Rural Payments. If you want to direct your EWCO payments to an authorised agent, they must also be registered on Rural Payments. You must have registered your land on Rural Payments before we can offer you an Agreement. We advise applicants to register their land before making an application.

## 1.3 Important information

EWCO is provided under domestic legislation. You may need to keep evidence and provide it when requested. Check [Section 7.4](#) for evidence and record-keeping requirements before you apply.

The Forestry Commission reserves the right to:

- not award grant funding for some or all the activities for which applications are invited
- amend, add or withdraw the elements of EWCO at any time (where such changes affect a current application, the applicant will be notified of the change and how it affects their application)

## 1.4 Disclaimer

The Forestry Commission makes every effort to ensure this Grant Manual, its Appendices, and associated Application Forms are accurate. However, neither the FC nor its respective advisers, officers, delivery partners, employees, other staff or agents:

makes any representation or warranty (express or implied) as to the accuracy, reasonableness or completeness of this documentation  
accepts any responsibility for the information contained in the documentation or for the fairness, accuracy or completeness of that information, nor shall any of them be liable for any loss or damage (other than in respect of fraudulent misrepresentation) arising because of reliance on such information or any subsequent communication

## 1.5 Guarding against fraud

Fraudsters may target land managers who receive grant payments, and we are aware that in the past some customers have received emails, texts and telephone calls claiming to be from the Forestry Commission, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) or Defra.

Remember:

- never discuss your bank account details with someone you do not know
- we will not ask you to make a payment over the phone
- delete any emails or texts you do not believe are genuine, and do not open any links. Our main email addresses are:
  - [EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk)
  - [ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk)
  - [rpa@notifications.service.gov.uk](mailto:rpa@notifications.service.gov.uk)
- be cautious about what information you share externally, particularly on social media

If you suspect attempted fraud or feel you have been the subject of fraud, you can contact:

- [Action Fraud](#) (the UK's national reporting centre for fraud and cyber-crime) online or on 0300 123 2040
- RPA's Fraud Referral Team on 0800 347 347 or [FraudInConfidence@rpa.gov.uk](mailto:FraudInConfidence@rpa.gov.uk) if the attempt relates to information held by the RPA or claimed to be from the RPA

We apply controls to guard against fraud and monitor all financial transactions for potential instances of fraud, and any circumstances where we believe there could be an attempt to obtain grant funds by deception will be fully investigated.

## 2 Overview

You can submit an application to EWCO at any time of the year. Please note that it could take 3 to 5 months from the point of us receiving a valid application to an Agreement being offered. Timescales depend on various factors, for example stakeholder engagement on your woodland creation proposal. Applications received after October each year are unlikely to receive an Agreement in time to plant that winter.

### 2.1 Tree supply and biosecurity

You should speak to a tree nursery to ensure sufficient planting stock will be available for your project.

It is important that the plants and trees you use are free from pests and diseases. All applications received from 22 June 2022 will be included in a Biosecure Procurement Requirement Pilot. To be eligible for support under EWCO during this pilot phase you must source your plants from suppliers who can provide evidence that they meet the requirements set out in the Plant Health Management Standard, available on the [Plant Healthy website](#).

This evidence should be provided in one of 2 ways:

1. Current membership of the **Plant Healthy Certification** scheme (provision of a Certification Number) or have officially applied to become certified (provision of an Application Number). For nurseries who are not current members of Plant Healthy certification, this should be achieved within 12 months.
2. Successful **Ready to Plant (RtP) assessment** (provision of a RtP Assessment Voucher with a Unique Reference Number) associated with the grant agreement number.

You will be asked to provide this evidence (one or more of the above Numbers) when you claim for your trees. You will also be asked about your intended supply at point of application, but you are **not** obliged to stick with your initial choice.

Please consider that it is your responsibility to ensure that the trees you source are compliant with this procurement requirement. You need to confirm that the supplier is an **official applicant** or **certified business / organisation** under the Plant Healthy scheme by checking the [Plant Healthy Directory of Certified Businesses and Organisations](#). If the supplier does not appear on the Directory, then it is not covered by the scheme. Alternatively, you must obtain a Ready to Plant Assessment Voucher from the supplier for the stock you are purchasing from them. Failure to adhere to the requirement may result in a reduced claim payment.

The RtP assessment allows suppliers who are not Plant Healthy certified to demonstrate that their plants comply with the requirements of the Plant Health Management Standard. The assessment only applies for each specific grant agreement so you will need to give your EWCO reference number to each nursery when ordering your stock. Each nursery will need to apply for a RtP assessment if they are not members of Plant Healthy. Suppliers who wish to supply more than one grant agreement will need to apply for a Ready to Plant assessment for each one. You can find out more about Ready to Plant on the [Ready to Plant website](#).

The Animal and Plant Health Agency's (APHA) Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate will contact a selection of grant recipients for a post-planting inspection approximately 18 months after the trees have been planted. If APHA issue a notice to remove the trees, the Grant Recipient will be expected to claim force majeure under the terms of their grant agreement.

If you are not purchasing your trees from a commercial supplier, you may be granted an exception to this requirement during the pilot phase. It is recommended that exceptions are requested at application stage. You must wait for the exception to be approved by the Forestry Commission in writing, prior to sourcing the trees, to ensure your claims are valid. Forms submitted alongside claims may delay payment while they are assessed. When you apply for your exception, you must provide a summary of how and where your trees will be sourced, and the biosecurity measures that will be in place to reduce the risks to those trees from diseases and insect pests. To apply for an exception please complete and submit a [Biosecure Procurement Exception form](#).

See [Forest Research's pest and disease resources](#) for usual information on control measures.



## 2.2 The EWCO Agreement

If your application is successful, you will receive an Agreement Offer. If you accept the offer you will enter into an Agreement with the Forestry Commission. This Agreement will consist of:

- EWCO Grant Funding Agreement Terms and Conditions (or simply 'Terms and Conditions')
- annexes to the above, which include this EWCO Grant Manual
- Grant Offer Letter
- Grant Recipient's Application Form
- Agreement Map
- Access Map (if required)
- Acceptance Letter

Your Grant could include the 5 elements of EWCO set out in [Section 1.1](#). You must use the EWCO Application Form to provide detail on the elements you are applying for in each compartment or block of woodland in the application. The final version of the EWCO Application Form we agree with you will be part of your Agreement and set out the work you need to do and payments you will receive.

Your Agreement duration will include 2 periods: a **Grant Funding Period** and an **Obligation Period**.

### 2.2.1 Capital element of the EWCO Agreement

The capital element of your EWCO Grant includes the payments for standard cost items and actual cost items. The Grant Funding Period will run for 3 years from the Commencement Date of your Agreement until the End of Capital Funding Date. The Grant Funding Period may not run for this full period if you finish the work before then. During this period, you must complete all the capital works (activities supported through standard or actual costs).

You will have an additional 3 months from the End of Capital Funding Date to submit your claim for payment. We will not accept claims received after this date unless we agree to an amendment to extend the Grant Funding Period.

You must not submit a claim for payment until you have paid for the capital items in the claim and the payment has left your bank account. You must not begin capital works before you have formally accepted your EWCO Agreement Offer.

Support for the standard costs under your EWCO Agreement (excluding payments towards the actual costs of infrastructure for management and to enable recreation) is subject to a cap that limits the amount that can be paid. The cap is taken as an average per hectare across the whole application. The payment cap is an average of £10,200 per hectare over the gross area of the scheme. If you use the MS Excel spreadsheet version of the EWCO Application Form, this will be calculated automatically.

You can voluntarily choose to reduce the cap for standard costs payments to a minimum of £2,500 per hectare. Some landowners may find this flexibility useful when proving additionality for accessing Ecosystem Service markets, for example the Woodland Carbon Code. All cases are different, please refer to your financial adviser to decide what is appropriate for you. You will still be under obligation for all items in your agreement even if you decide to voluntarily reduce the cap.

If a scheme requires capital works that exceed the cap, your EWCO Agreement will require all the capital items and activities to be undertaken even though your payment for standard costs will be limited to the cap. We will work with you to develop the scheme, but we will make the final decision on the capital items and activities that are required to ensure woodland will establish.

You must maintain any capital items funded through the scheme for 15 years from the date of final payment for the capital items. This is called the Obligation Period of the Agreement. Your Agreement may be subject to inspection during the Obligation Period.

You must have management control of the land for the length of the Agreement. This includes the Grant Funding Period to undertake the capital work and the Obligation Period. [Section 3.2](#) explains how this requirement applies if you are a landlord or a tenant.

### 2.2.2 Maintenance element of the EWCO Agreement

You must confirm if you wish to include annual Maintenance Payments in your Agreement in the EWCO Application Form.

To support the successful establishment and ongoing maintenance of the new woodland you will need to:

- replace any trees that die, to ensure required stocking density is maintained by year 5 and to ensure canopy closure will be obtained by year 20 after planting
- ensure all planted trees are kept free from competing vegetation and grazing animals
- maintain tree protection (fencing, shelters, spiral guards)

- maintain planned temporary open space
- remove and dispose of tree guards in an appropriate manner (for example recycle) when no longer required, and by year 15 in all cases
- ensure all trees are suitably protected against herbivores, (browsing and bark stripping animals), either individually or collectively, and maintain this protection throughout the Obligation Period
- avoid using any herbicides if trees are being planted on land next to a watercourse

### If you decide not to receive annual Maintenance Payments

If you do not wish to take up the Maintenance Payments then you must continue to maintain the capital items, funded through the capital element of the Agreement, for 15 years following the date of the final capital payment (the Obligation Period – see [Section 2.2.1](#)). You must confirm you understand this requirement in the EWCO Application and Declaration Forms and that you understand we may inspect the scheme during the Obligation Period. You can find more information about inspections in [Section 7.3](#).

The exceptions to this rule are leaky woody dams. These standard cost items must be maintained for 2 years from the date they are claimed for.

Where the Additional Contribution for recreational access is included in the Agreement, permissive access must be maintained on the site for at least 30 years, along with the associated signage advising the public of permissive access over the site.

### 2.2.3 Additional Contribution element of the EWCO Agreement

Additional Contributions are optional and will be available where the woodland's location and design will deliver public benefits (see [Section 4.3.4](#)). Additional Contributions are made in recognition that woodland creation can make contributions to the following public benefits:

- **nature recovery** – available where woodland creation will expand areas of existing native woodland, create new native woodlands, or will expand habitat for red squirrel populations, helping woodland-dependent priority species to recover
- **water quality** – available where woodland creation will help reduce pollutants through land use change that reduces fertilizer application or by creating woodland that intercepts pollution and sediment before it reaches watercourses
- **flood risk management** – available where woodland creation can help reduce the risk of flooding
- **riparian buffers** – available where woodland creation with native broadleaved species will provide the dappled shade that will improve aquatic ecology, and

benefit wildlife dispersal (for example, otter) along the corridors of habitat this creates

- **close to settlements** – available where woodland creation will provide social benefits by being close to people
- **recreational access** – available where woodland creation will provide permissive access for recreation on land that does not currently have access to it, for at least 30 years

Additional Contributions are paid once the associated capital works are complete. Where the location and design of the woodland means that multiple benefits will be provided, Additional Contributions for different public benefits can be stacked.

Additional Contributions are only available to Grant Recipients at the point of application and cannot be added to Grant Funding Agreements which commenced prior to the introduction of the new Additional Contribution.

### 2.2.4 Low Sensitivity Land Payment element of the EWCO Agreement

The Low Sensitivity Land Payment was introduced on 19 March 2024 and is available to all applications received from 29 February 2024, when the Woodland Creation Fast Track was launched (see [Section 4.9.1](#)).

The Low Sensitivity Land Payment is optional and will be available where the woodland's location falls within a low sensitivity area for woodland creation (see [Section 4.3.5](#)). This payment is paid once the associated capital works are complete. This payment can be stacked with the Additional Contributions for public benefits.

## 2.3 How applications are selected

EWCO is a criteria-based competitive scheme, with funding offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants need to score their applications and we will review this. We will offer Agreements to applicants whose proposal score meet or exceed a threshold score. The threshold score set is based on the available budget and is reviewed every 3 months. The current score will be shown on the [EWCO GOV.UK webpage](#).

You need to score your own application first by filling in the Scoring section of the EWCO Application Form. You need to meet or exceed the current threshold score for us to accept your initial application and take it forward.

Once you have agreed your final application with your Woodland Officer, we will give it a final score. If your application has a final score equal to or greater than the threshold score that applied at the time of your initial application, we will offer you an Agreement.

The highest scores under EWCO are for applications that have the greatest positive impact on:

- climate change – for more information see:
  - [Climate change: impacts and adaptation in England’s woodlands](#)
  - [Tree species and provenance](#)
  - [Managing England’s woodlands in a climate emergency](#)
- using private finance to support woodland creation – see [Section 4.3.5](#)
- creating woodland where there are likely to be fewer sensitivities or constraints to woodland creation – see [Section 4.3.5](#)
- nature recovery – see [Section 4.3.4](#) and Appendix 2
- water quality – see [Section 4.3](#) and Appendix 2
- planting riparian buffers – see [Section 4.3](#) and Appendix 2
- flood risk prevention – see [Section 4.3](#) and Appendix 2
- public access and other social benefits – see [Section 4.3](#) and Appendix 2
- ammonia capture to protect vulnerable Sites of Special Scientific Interest

If your application is unsuccessful you can re-apply at any time. However, you will be advised to change your application to increase its score, so that it has a chance of meeting the threshold score.

If the budget becomes limited, and the value of applications received is likely to exceed the available budget, we will set a closing deadline for further applications. Applications received before the deadline will be prioritised based on their score until the budget is exhausted. If any scores are tied, applications that have the greatest points for the provision of public access will be prioritised. We will notify applicants of any change to this approach through our [eAlert](#) and on GOV.UK.

## 2.4 What the grant cannot pay for

EWCO cannot be used to pay for the cost of any of the following, which will not be considered Eligible Expenditure:

- any capital works initiated before the Agreement Commencement Date
- any capital works required in the Agreement, but which mean the average capital value of the Agreement exceeds the cap on capital items and activities (see [Section 2.2.1](#))
- planning application fees or other transactional fees
- agent fees or other advisory fees (unless included in the quotes for infrastructure)
- meeting legal requirements, including planning conditions
- woodland creation for short rotation coppice or short rotation forestry
- creating Christmas tree plantations or planting cricket bat willow

- planting trees on land which we consider to be an existing woodland

## 3 Who can apply and what land is eligible

To confirm your eligibility for EWCO you will need to complete the EWCO Declaration Form. You must also confirm your commitment to abide by the [Code of Conduct for Recipients of Government General Grants](#). If you do not do this, or during our processing of your application we find any part of your application is not eligible, we will reject part or all of your application.

If they have control of all the land and all the activities needed to meet the Obligations of the Grant for the full duration of the Agreement, EWCO is open to land managers who are either:

- an owner occupier
- a tenant
- a landlord
- a licensor

On tenanted land, both tenants and landlords will need to agree to the proposal.

We will use the government's 'Spotlight' system to undertake due diligence checks on applicants and to ensure the safe award of EWCO funds. Spotlight enables the checking of information on grant applicants from across government to reduce the risk of fraud, dual-funding and the mismanagement of grant aid.

### 3.1 Eligible Land

#### 3.1.1 What land can be entered into the scheme

You can include land that is not already classified as woodland as part of your EWCO application if there is no existing legal requirement or obligation to create woodland on the land. Land that is currently managed as Short Rotation Coppice or Short Rotation Forestry is not eligible for EWCO.

#### 3.1.2 Ineligible land

The following land is not eligible for EWCO, and you cannot include it in your application:

- any land which is not entirely within England
- developed land and hard standing (including permanent caravan sites and areas used for permanent storage)

- land that is already part of another obligation which is incompatible with EWCO
- land where you do not have management control for the duration of the Agreement
- land that is subject to a dispute between a landlord and tenants
- land that is currently in an agri-environment agreement which has more than 6 months to run unless the RPA agrees the land can be removed from that agreement – see [Section 3.3.1](#).

## 3.2 Management control

You must have management control of the land and all activities needed to meet the requirements of the EWCO Agreement for its full duration (see [Section 2.2.1](#)). If you do not, you must get the written consent of all other parties who have management control of the land and activities to undertake these activities for the duration of the Agreement.

### 3.2.1 Tenants

If you are a tenant applying for an Agreement in your name, you must have:

- control of all the activities needed to meet the scheme requirements for the chosen capital items
- security of tenure for the duration of the Agreement
- management control of all the Agreement land for the duration of the Agreement
- agreement from your landlord to enter into the Agreement (your landlord must countersign the EWCO Declaration Form). If you are not able to do this, you cannot include that area of land in your application

If the landlord takes over your EWCO Agreement once your tenancy has ended, they must be eligible to do so. Tenants should seek legal advice on their position should their tenancy cease unexpectedly before the end of any EWCO Agreement.

If you are a tenant, including under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986, the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 (a Farm Business Tenancy) or equivalent, it is your responsibility to check that you do not breach the terms of your tenancy by joining EWCO.

We encourage landlords and tenants to work together to take woodland creation proposals forward. Please see further guidance from the Tenancy Reform Industry Group (TRIG): [Tree Planting and Woodland Creation on Agricultural Tenancies](#).

### 3.2.2 Landlords

If you are a landlord and can show that you retain management control over the land that has been let to a tenant to enable woodland creation, you can include that land in your EWCO application.

Landlords will not be able to apply for funding on any land that is or has been subject to dispute within the last 12 months, for example, a contested notice to quit. You must declare this in your application.

As the Grant Recipient, you must give your tenant a copy of the EWCO Agreement. We may ask you to provide evidence to show that you have done this. It is your responsibility to make sure that your tenant does not breach the Terms and Conditions of the Agreement.

We are currently running a Supporting Tenant to Landlord Successions Pilot which gives landlords the option to supply their Single Business Identifier (SBI) when countersigning the application. This will allow for the landlord to automatically succeed the scheme should the tenant leave. Further information on this pilot can be found in Appendix 6.

### 3.2.3 Partnerships

If you are in a business partnership, you can apply to EWCO.

### 3.2.4 Licensors

If you are a licensor, you can apply to EWCO. It is your responsibility to make sure that the licensee does not breach the Terms and Conditions of the EWCO Agreement. You must make sure that the licensee is aware of the requirements of the Agreement, as relevant to the licence, and include these in the licence agreement.

### 3.2.5 Licensees

If you are a licensee, you may be eligible for EWCO in certain circumstances if you can demonstrate full management control of the land for the duration of the Agreement.

### 3.2.6 Land owned by public bodies

Land owned or run by a public body is eligible for EWCO where woodland creation is not already required or paid for through:

- payment from EU and Exchequer funds
- grant aid from any other public body
- any other form of legally binding obligation, including tenancies



Public Bodies applying to EWCO must meet the following conditions, which recognise that public land is a public asset:

- public bodies should ensure land is managed in line with [Managing Public Money](#), including through disposing of surplus land and buildings in a way that delivers value for the taxpayer, boosts growth and delivers new homes
- estates professionals and policy teams should therefore consider how land retained for tree planting and woodland creation can be used for this purpose whilst meeting other departmental outcomes and delivering wider public benefits – you should keep a record of this decision-making, which we may ask to see
- provide public access over at least half of the site, except where to do so would unavoidably undermine public safety – this must be through either permissive access for at least 30 years, or a dedicated right of access over the site

In addition, where central government departments or their arm's length bodies apply to plant trees on their land, the relevant HMT Spending Team must agree with the intention to undertake the permanent land use change before the EWCO Agreement is offered. This is to ensure specific proposals for woodland creation on public land represent good value for the public. You will need to provide evidence that your HMT Spending Team is content with your EWCO application. Further information can be found in [Classification of public bodies: guidance for departments](#).

Land owned by public bodies that is planted under EWCO will not be eligible for delinked payments that replaced the Basic Payment Scheme unless it is managed by a private body or a local authority.

Public bodies applying to EWCO are encouraged to partner with third-party organisations, wherever possible and appropriate, to deliver the creation and management of new woodlands. This can secure better value for public money, increased community engagement, and a wider range of environmental and social benefits from the woodland. Whilst this is not a requirement to apply to EWCO, we will monitor it. You will need to confirm in the EWCO Application Form if an application from a public body includes a third party and, if not, any steps you took to determine whether a partnership opportunity was available. This will allow us to monitor how and where partnerships are enabling public bodies to plant and manage woodlands.

If you are a tenant of a public body, you may be able to apply to EWCO - see [Section 3.2.1](#). If you are a tenant of a public body, please [contact your Forestry Commission Area Team](#) to discuss your application.

### 3.2.7 Joint applications and consortia

Applications from multiple land managers are eligible for EWCO.

Once potential applicants have decided to pursue a joint EWCO application, they will need to agree who will make the application on their behalf – the 'lead applicant.' If the application is successful, the lead applicant will become the named Grant Recipient on behalf of the land managers and will be responsible for all requirements of the Agreement. We need all the land managers to countersign the EWCO Declaration Form to confirm their consent that the lead applicant can act on their behalf, including entering into an Agreement.

The lead applicant will be the main business contact for the EWCO application and subsequent EWCO Agreement. This person will sign the EWCO Agreement on behalf of all the land managers, act on behalf of the land managers and receive EWCO payments. Any action to recover grant funding under a EWCO Agreement will also be with the lead applicant. The Single Business Identifier (SBI) of the lead applicant will be used and they may authorise an agent to act on their behalf.

An agreement to collaborate between the land managers must be established to support the EWCO application and meet the requirements of any subsequent EWCO Agreement. This should ensure those who are party to the agreement collaborate to share responsibility for compliance with the EWCO Agreement. The day-to-day administration will be the responsibility of the lead applicant. It will also need to set out a formula to apportion payments to the land managers, and arrangements to reimburse the lead applicant if the recovery of grant funds is required. The Forestry Commission will not be involved in the drafting, production or any disputes related to this private agreement, but you will need to provide evidence of these arrangements to us if asked.

### 3.2.8 Compatibility with delinked payments

Delinked payments replaced the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) on 01 January 2024. Delinked payments are compatible with EWCO.

## 3.3 Land receiving other funding or under other agreements

You cannot use EWCO funding to carry out capital works that are required under other agreements. For example, work might be required as part of a tenancy agreement or grant schemes such as:

- Environmental Stewardship
- Countryside Stewardship
- English Woodland Grant Scheme

- Farming Recovery Fund
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Inheritance Tax Exemption
- other woodland creation schemes from the FC and woodland creation partnerships

You must declare that any work proposed as part of your application does not breach the conditions of another agreement. We will carry out checks to make sure that capital works are not funded twice from public money. If we find the EWCO application would result in a conflict between government funding or dual funding, we will reject the application. If this is found to be the case where an Agreement is in place, we may recover the EWCO Grant funds paid to date and close the Agreement.

If your application is on land that is already in an Environmental Stewardship (ES) or Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement, Natural England and RPA will check it to make sure the work is compatible. However, it is your responsibility to make sure that you and the land are eligible.

The [Woodland Carbon Guarantee \(WCaG\)](#) is an incentive scheme to help accelerate woodland planting rates across England. You can make a WCaG application alongside applications to EWCO.

### 3.3.1 Applications on land currently in Environmental Stewardship (ES)

You can apply to EWCO on land currently in an ES agreement if the agreement has less than 6 months to run. Where we process an application within the 6 months, we will not issue an Agreement until it has expired.

If the land in your EWCO application is under an ES agreement with more than 6 months to run or you want a EWCO agreement before the ES expires you may apply to EWCO, but you will need to remove the land from your ES agreement. It may be possible to do this without a repayment of the ES payments if both the following conditions are met:

- a) the transfer of land into EWCO will result in a net improvement in environmental management on that land, compared to management under the existing ES agreement
- b) the ES agreement remains viable after transfer of the land and removal from the ES agreement

When we receive a EWCO application for land in an ES agreement we will arrange for the RPA to assess whether these conditions are met. The RPA will make this assessment with advice from Natural England. We will inform you of the result of the assessment. If these conditions are not met then your application will require further consideration from

the RPA, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. If these conditions are met, then your EWCO application and amendment to your ES agreement can be processed in parallel. Note that land under specific Higher Level Stewardship options is unlikely to meet the conditions.

If conditions (a) and (b) are met, you will need to request a Land Transfer and Amendment (LTA1) form from the RPA. You must complete and submit this form to the RPA to request amendment to your ES agreement. You can request the LTA1 from the RPA either by:

- email: [ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk)
- phone: 03000 200 301

You may also need to submit a request to the RPA to adjust the boundaries of a land parcel, if you wish to move only part of a land parcel into EWCO. This can be done via a new [RPA digital service](#) or by submitting a paper Rural Land and Entitlements (RLE1) form in the post. You can find [guidance on how to make changes to your rural land maps](#) on GOV.UK.

To help us process your EWCO application, please send us a copy of your LTA1 form and evidence of any mapping requests.

Please note the ES amendment will not be finalised until the EWCO application has been processed. Where the EWCO application is successful, we will offer an Agreement in Principle. You will then need to instruct the RPA to complete the amendment to allow the EWCO agreement to go live.

For enquiries relating to EWCO or this process, please contact [EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk). For enquiries relating to conditions (a) and (b), or the process of removing land from an ES agreement, please contact [ruralpayments@rpa.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@rpa.gov.uk).

### 3.3.2 Applications on land currently in Countryside Stewardship (CS)

You can apply to EWCO on land currently in a CS agreement if the agreement has less than 6 months to run. Where we process an application within the 6 months, we will not issue a EWCO agreement until the CS agreement has expired.

If the land in your EWCO application is under a CS agreement with more than 6 months to run or you want a EWCO agreement before the CS expires you may apply to EWCO, but you will need to remove the land from your CS agreement. It may be possible to do this without repaying the CS payments if both the following conditions are met:

- a) transfer of land into EWCO will result in a net improvement in the environmental management of that land compared to management under the existing CS agreement
- b) woodland establishment does not detract from the overall objectives of the existing CS agreement

When we receive a EWCO application for land in a CS agreement we will arrange for the RPA to assess whether these conditions are met. The RPA will make this assessment with advice from Natural England. We will inform you of the result of the assessment.

If conditions (a) and (b) are not met then your application will require further consideration from the RPA, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. You may still choose to take land out of a current CS agreement to make an application to EWCO, but it may be subject to repayments and fees. The exception to this may be moving rotational options under a Mid-Tier Agreement to different land parcels. This may be possible without a repayment.

If conditions (a) and (b) are met, then your EWCO application and amendment to your CS agreement can be processed in parallel. Note that land under specific Higher Level Stewardship options is unlikely to meet the conditions.

You may also need to submit a request to the RPA to adjust the boundaries of a land parcel if you wish to move only part of a land parcel into EWCO. This can be done via a new [RPA digital service](#) or by submitting a paper Rural Land and Entitlements (RLE1) form in the post. You can find [guidance on how to make changes to your rural land maps](#) on GOV.UK.

To help us process your EWCO application, send us a copy of your amendment request and evidence of any mapping requests.

Please note the CS amendment will not be finalised until the EWCO application has been processed. Where the EWCO application is successful, we will offer an Agreement in Principle. You will then need to instruct the RPA to complete the amendment to allow us to confirm the EWCO agreement can go live.

If conditions (a) and (b) are not met, you must agree with the RPA removal of the land from the CS agreement before your EWCO application can be processed further.

In all cases, to request a change to your CS agreement you must contact RPA by either:

- email: [ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk)
- phone: 03000 200 301

For enquiries relating to EWCO or this process, please contact [EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk). For enquiries relating to conditions (a) and (b), or the process of removing land from an CS agreement, please contact [ruralpayments@rpa.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@rpa.gov.uk).

### 3.4 Common land and shared grazing

Common land and shared grazing are eligible for EWCO. Commoners and graziers need to agree and name one person to sign the application. This person will then be responsible for maintaining any subsequent EWCO Agreement, if accepted, on behalf of all the commoners or graziers.

Applications on common land that include the Additional Contribution for recreational access will need to include evidence that there is not an existing right of access over the land.

If your application is on common land or an area of shared grazing, you must read Appendix 4, which sets out further requirements. You must complete and submit a copy of the [EWCO Common Land and Shared Grazing Supplementary Form](#).

Proposals on common land or areas of shared grazing may need consent from the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – for example where the work would prevent or impede access or for works to the surface of the land. For more information on consents, please see Appendix 3.

### 3.5 Business viability and due diligence

We will complete due diligence checks on applications and applicants, including checks on previous grant performance, the background of the potential grant recipient and basic financial checks. We are under no obligation to accept any application or offer a grant agreement and if we deem that your application does not pass these checks, we may not offer you an Agreement. Applications involving capital expenditure over certain limits will require additional evidence and undergo additional checks.

You will need to provide evidence you (the SBI or business) have the resources from trading profits, reserves or loans to undertake the capital work proposed in the application if the value of capital items (including support for any actual costs infrastructure) exceeds £50,000; we will make automated checks where we can. If the value of capital items exceeds £500,000 in the application (or more across multiple applications and agreements with the same person) we may also ask to see accounts for the last 3 years. If any of this evidence is required, we will need this before we can offer an Agreement.

The following table sets out how these requirements apply to different types of applicants. We will always check online for published accounts before asking you to provide them.

| <b>Type of business</b>                                 | <b>Value of capital items over 50K</b>   | <b>Value of capital items over 100K</b>  | <b>Value of capital items over £500K</b>            |
|---|--|--|---|
| Sole trader, private individual, community group, Trust | Savings statements or bank statements (last 3 months). Or evidence of an Approved loan for capital funds | Savings statements or bank statements (last 3 months). Or evidence of an Approved loan for capital funds | Accountants letter and previous 2 years tax returns |
| Charity, Charitable Trust                               | Automated system check   | The previous years accounts  | 3 years of accounts                                 |
| Private or Charitable company                           | Automated system check   | Automated system check and previous years accounts   | 3 years of accounts                                 |
| Public limited company                                  | Automated system check   | Automated system check and previous years accounts   | 3 years previous online accounts                    |
| Local Authority, Public Bodies, Universities            | Departmental letter of authority to spend on capital items in the agreement or Treasury report           | Departmental letter of authority to spend on capital items in the agreement or Treasury report           | Access to 3 years accounts, check online            |

If an accountant’s letter is needed, or if you prefer to submit this type of evidence then the accountant will need to provide a letter on headed paper, dated within the last 3 months, that confirms at least the following:

- they are a chartered accountant and act as the accountant for you or your business
- they can confirm that you have sufficient finances to complete the capital works in the application and how these funds will be sourced (for example, savings or loans)
- show their understanding of the total value of the capital works in the application
- and where you as the agreement holder have multiple applications, the confirmation must cover the cumulative funds for all applications



## 4 How it works

This section provides information about the main elements of the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO). If the process and application requirements for EWCO change, the [EWCO GOV.UK page](#) will be updated and we will notify any current applicants in writing within 14 days.

### 4.1 Preparing a woodland creation plan

A Forestry Commission Woodland Officer will assess your application to make sure the proposed woodland creation is appropriate. To support this process, you will need to prepare a Woodland Creation Plan by completing the relevant parts of the EWCO Application Form. This is not needed if you have a Woodland Creation Design Plan approved by the FC through the [Woodland Creation Planning Grant \(WCPG\)](#).

The Woodland Creation Plan (WCP) forms part of the EWCO Application Form, which you must complete and submit as part of your application. Your WCP must show how the proposal meets the [UK Forestry Standard](#) (UKFS) and its associated guidelines. Refer to the [Guide to planning a new woodland in England](#) to ensure your WCPs are fit for purpose, and you understand any consents that may be needed beyond those from the Forestry Commission. Your WCP will also need to give the reasoning for the capital items that support the tree establishment (for example, protection requirements).

In your WCP you need to record the objectives for the new woodland and give key details such as the tree species you plan to plant, proportions, stocking density and percentage of open space. The planting density (measured in 'stems per hectare') varies depending on the species choice and the objectives of the proposed Agreement.

To receive support under EWCO the proposal must be compliant with the relevant requirements and guidelines of the UKFS and secure the minimum threshold score. This will generally mean that the proposal's planting design meets requirements set out in the proposal level scoring criteria or is specifically designed to provide the benefits that merit the Additional Contribution(s) (see [Section 4.3.4](#) and Appendix 2). This includes species, stocking density and open space.

The planning of your new woodland should consider how it will accommodate features of interest such as historic monuments or priority habitats that may be impacted by woodland creation. There is guidance on the forest design process in the UKFS and the FC [Practice Guide on Design techniques for forest management planning](#).

It is mandatory to contact the Historic Environment Record and Local Environmental Records Centre before submitting an application. You must provide evidence you have

contacted them and confirm this in the WCP4 tab of the EWCO Application Form. You will also find information on how to conduct this search in the same tab.

You should consider building resilience to climate change into your woodland design. Find more information in the FC publication [Managing England's woodlands in a climate emergency](#) and [Climate change impacts and adaptation in English woodlands](#).

To support a EWCO application that includes Additional Contributions you will need to describe the objective(s) for woodland creation (for example, planting for water, planting for nature recovery or planting for combined objectives) in your Woodland Creation Plan. You can find guidelines on planting for nature recovery, water and social objectives in Appendix 2. You will need to meet these to be eligible for Additional Contributions.

You will also need to record information on any constraints to woodland creation in the Woodland Creation Plan and show how you have considered these in the woodland's design. To do this you will need to acknowledge and consider environmental sensitivity, protected species and designations in and around the proposed site and any impacts the proposed scheme may have.

If ecology surveys are required in relation to a woodland creation scheme, these nearly always have restrictions on the time of year that they can be carried out. Arranging a survey will also require lead-in time. If the application is received during or only shortly in advance of the start of the survey period, there is a high risk that the survey will not be completed until the following year. It's particularly important to note that ecological consultants become extremely busy at certain times of year and the timings reflect this.

The following table provides survey periods and the deadline by which we recommend applications are submitted to be reasonably confident that the survey can be completed in the next survey season.

| <b>Survey type</b>                | <b>Timing</b>                                     | <b>Deadline to make your application</b><br>(to plant in the next planting season) | <b>Comments</b>   |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Standard ecology surveys</i>   |   |  |   |
| Breeding birds (including waders) | March to July                                     | 1 December of preceding year   | Survey must be started in March   |
| Vegetation/habitat/ NVC           | April to September (optimal period May to August) | 15 March   | Depends partly on habitat type and area of UK, as flowering periods are later further north. Surveys of woodland ground flora should be carried out in mid-April/ early June, most other habitats June onwards.     |
| Peat                              | Any time of year                                  | No restriction   |   |
| <i>Other ecology surveys</i>      |   |  |   |
| Invertebrates                     | Varies but mostly spring/ summer                  | 1 February   |   |
| Bats (summer roosts)              | May to September                                  | 1 February   |   |
| Bats (winter hibernation)         | November to February                              | 1 October  |   |
| Great crested newts               | March to June                                     | 15 January   | Half of surveys must be carried out between mid-April and mid-May. However, some parts of England now have district licensing schemes that <b>might</b> mean less or no survey is required. Consult Area Ecologist. |
| Dormice                           | April to November                                 | 1 February   |   |
| Other species                     |   |  | Consult Area Ecologist  |

You need to make sure the capital works in your application will not damage important features such as priority habitats and historic or archaeological features on or next to where the work will take place. This may mean you need to speak to neighbours and interested parties to explain the work. You should consult with neighbours and interested parties before you send your initial application, and your proposal will be published on the Public Register for 21 days.

If the capital work needs to be scheduled around seasonal activity, you must make sure you plan this well in advance.

Providing detailed information will mean we can assess the proposal under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999. **You do not need to submit a standalone EIA enquiry form related to your proposal in addition to your EWCO application.** You can find more information about the EIA process for woodland creation online at [Environmental Impact Assessments for woodland](#). The check we carry out at this stage does not confirm the details are correct. We may ask you for more information later or recover money we have already paid you if we find an issue.

### 4.1.2 The Woodland Creation Planning Grant

If your proposal is over 5ha in area, it may be eligible for the [Woodland Creation Planning Grant](#) (WCPG). WCPG contributes towards the costs of gathering and analysing the information land managers need to consider to ensure their proposals for new woodland take account of any impacts on biodiversity, landscape, water, soil, the historic environment and local stakeholders, as well as the impacts of climate change.

WCPG requires you to produce a UK Forestry Standard-compliant plan for creating the woodland that shows how you have considered any constraints and opportunities.

**If you are applying to (or have an existing agreement under) WCPG you can only apply for EWCO once we have made you a Stage 2 Offer under the WCPG.**

WCPG has a separate application process and is open to applications all year round.

## 4.2 Eligibility requirements

### 4.2.1 Planting area, stocking and species

To be eligible for a EWCO Agreement, your application must cover a minimum area of 1ha with individual blocks of at least 0.1ha each. Blocks must have a minimum width of 20 metres (with the exception of riparian buffers and shelterbelts, which can have a minimum width of 10 metres).

Where you are proposing to create woodland through natural colonisation the land must also meet the requirements in [Section 4.4](#) and Appendix 5.

Areas of integral woodland open space are eligible for EWCO. Where the area exceeds 20% (or that specified in the Additional Contribution design requirements) of the gross woodland area (or exceeds a discrete area of over 0.5ha or 20m width of non-linear open space), agreement from your Woodland Officer will be required. The inclusion of such areas is at the Forestry Commission's sole discretion. Open space includes woodland tracks, rides, way leaves and other permanent open areas. Including open space on the perimeter of your application area should be discussed and agreed with your Woodland Officer. It may be possible to include a track up to 5m wide on the perimeter where it is required for access or for managing existing features, such as hedgerow.

Areas of existing tree cover are not eligible for EWCO funding. However, small groups of trees or linear features within the footprint may be permissible. This should be discussed and agreed with your Woodland Officer

Ponds with an area of water up to 0.25ha, whether existing or being created, can be included in an EWCO application and their area can be included in the extent of the annual Maintenance Payment and any relevant Additional Contributions. This assumes no funding for their creation or maintenance is being claimed from elsewhere. The annual Maintenance Payment will require appropriate management of the pond and there will need to be evidence of planned management activity associated with the pond to justify the payment.

Ponds with an area of water >0.25ha will need to be identified in the summary tab of the Application Form with an area of 0.00ha so that they are not included for any funding.

The minimum stocking density for planting broadleaves expected under EWCO will usually be 1,100 trees per ha for broadleaves (1,600 where Additional Contribution for Nature Recovery is applied for) and 2,500 trees per ha for conifers. EWCO will not pay for stocking higher than 2,500 trees per ha, but applications can include higher stocking densities. Lower stocking of broadleaves – to a minimum of 400 trees per ha – may be permitted in exceptional circumstances where this will support nature recovery. This exception can also be applied, where appropriate, if the Nature Recovery Additional Contribution has been applied for. In all cases we will agree the minimum required stocking density with you.

All applications must satisfy current UKFS guidelines regarding species choice and open space. We will accept up to 20% woody shrubs and small trees, with 30% required for the Nature Recovery Additional Contribution. We may accept up to 15% species whose

performance, potential for invasiveness and susceptibility to known plant health issues when grown in England is currently not proven. The use of such species will be at the discretion of the FC. Your Forestry Commission Woodland Officer can confirm the species to which this applies.

EWCO does not fund the planting of Paulownia species. However, Paulownia species can be included within a woodland creation proposal submitted to EWCO. The use of Paulownia species will be assessed as part of the application through the Environmental Impact Assessment process.

EWCO supports the planting of UKFS-compliant woodland where the proposed long-term silvicultural system is coppice management. This does **not** include energy crop schemes, short rotation coppice or short rotation forestry.

EWCO does **not** support the planting of cricket bat willow (CBW).

#### 4.2.2 Lesser-known species

EWCO funding aims to support species diversification. It also aims to ensure that planting schemes are successful in the establishment phase and go on to produce healthy, thriving woodlands that produce a wide range of ecosystem services. To achieve a balance, EWCO allows for the limited use of lesser-known species (up to 15% of the overall species mix) where this is appropriate to the site and management objectives.

If any lesser-known species are included in your application, we will assess their suitability. Your Woodland Officer may discuss this with you further during the application process. Lesser-known species can be identified in orange on the Species List and Species Breakdown tabs of the EWCO Application Form. Where non-specific species (for example, 'other' or 'mixed' categories) are included in your species mix, you will need to provide the name(s) of the proposed species (ideally the scientific name) so that we can make our assessment. We may not fund any lesser-known species included in grant claims that are not agreed in advance.

#### 4.2.3 UKFS compliance and biosecurity

To receive support under EWCO the proposal must be compliant with the relevant requirements and guidelines of the UKFS and secure the EWCO minimum threshold score. The UKFS sets out the legal requirements and industry good practice guidelines for woodland creation and management.

The species you select to create the new woodland must consider any phytosanitary (plant health) restrictions or measures in place relating to preventing the introduction and spread of invasive tree pests and diseases, as well as the potential impact of existing threats.

It is important you consider how you can implement appropriate biosecurity measures when implementing the project and how the plants and trees you use are free from pests and diseases. To be eligible for support under EWCO you must source your plants from suppliers who can provide evidence that they meet the requirements set out in the [Plant Health Management Standard](#) (see [Section 2.1](#)). You can find information on [Tree pests and diseases](#) and biosecurity in [Prevent the introduction and spread of tree pests and diseases](#) guides on GOV.UK.

## 4.3 Payments

There are 5 types of payments available under EWCO:

1. Support for the capital items and activities to establish new woodland through **standard costs**.
2. 15 years of **annual Maintenance Payments** to help establish the young trees once the capital works are complete.
3. **Contribution towards the actual cost** of installing infrastructure to either enable the current and future management of the woodland, or to provide recreational access.
4. Optional **Additional Contributions** where the location of the woodland and its design will deliver. You can apply for multiple Additional Contributions on the same land where it touches the right spatial layer and the design is compatible.
5. An optional **Low Sensitivity Land Payment** where the proposal falls within a low sensitivity area for woodland creation.

### 4.3.1 Standard cost items and activities

You must use the EWCO Application Form to record the capital items you want to include (for example number of trees, gates and shelters, metres of fencing).

You can choose items from the list in Appendix 1. Each item has a payment rate that is the value of a one-off payment that will be paid towards the cost of that item or activity. Capital payments for items and activities will be paid at 100% of standard costs, based on national averages. Payments will be made once the work is completed.

We will accept claims for capital items purchased prior to the Agreement Commencement Date. However, you must not start work on site before the Agreement Commencement Date, for example planting any pre-ordered trees. We will reject any claims and will not pay for any work carried out (in part or in full) before the Agreement Commencement Date. Whilst applicants are encouraged to plan for grant activities, any final ordering and payment of materials prior to the Agreement Commencement Date is done so at the sole risk of the applicant and **the Forestry Commission will not accept liability for these items**.

### 4.3.2 Annual Maintenance Payments

You may be eligible for annual Maintenance Payments. If your Agreement includes this, you will receive annual payments of £400 per ha to maintain your woodland and any capital items that were funded under the Agreement for 15 years.

Annual Maintenance Payments will be paid in autumn each year. The first 5 years' payments will be triggered by payment of the final claim for capital work. Claims will be required at year 6 and year 11 to trigger payments for the following 5-year periods.

Your final claim for capital work must be made by 31 August for annual Maintenance Payments to begin in autumn of the same year. For any claims received after this date, or where the claim is invalid or subject to remedial work, payments will not begin until autumn of the following year.

### 4.3.3 Payments towards actual costs of infrastructure

EWCO may support the actual costs of the following:

- infrastructure required to support the establishment and future management of the woodland – we will provide 40% of actual costs based on a quote agreed with us
- recreational infrastructure to provide high quality public access where new permissive access will be provided or the work will improve existing recreational access provision, with no charge for the use of these facilities – we will provide 100% of actual costs based on a quote agreed with us

These payments will be capped at 10% of the total capital cost of your proposal (including the value of the actual costs). Grant Recipients will need to pay the VAT for these items. Where the Grant Recipient is VAT registered and can therefore claim back VAT from HMRC, we will exclude the VAT element from the Grant offer. Applicants are solely responsible for all aspects of taxation and are advised to seek advice from their accountant or a tax specialist before submitting their EWCO application.

For infrastructure to manage the woodland, such as tracks, roads and deer leaps, the specifications for the works must meet national legislation, following the construction, design, and management (CDM) regulations for forest roads and tracks. Further information can be found within [Forestry Commission Operations Note 25](#).

For infrastructure to enable or improve recreational access needs, the specifications for the works must meet the [Outdoor Accessibility Guidance](#). We will support the items below (if you want to include other items this will require agreement from your Woodland Officer):

- all ability footpath
- all ability gates (in line with BS5709 2018)



- post and disk waymarker
- routed waymarker
- interpretation boards – physical or digital
- bench with backrest
- footbridge – all ability access (surface and width)
- footpath steps
- ramp
- small car park

All ability access is assumed to be suitable for all-terrain buggies and off-road mobility scooters. Benches without back rests and stiles are not suitable for some people and are therefore not funded. RADAR gates do not meet the requirements to be 'all ability' and as a result are also not funded.

To apply for actual cost payments you will need to:

- submit a map that shows the proposed location of infrastructure
- declare you have the financing required to undertake the work in the EWCO Declaration Form
- provide specifications for the work
- provide an explanation as to why the infrastructure is needed within your EWCO Application Form
- for infrastructure that costs £5,000 or more you will also need to provide 3 quotes for the work

For infrastructure that costs £5,000 or more we will select the specification and quote we consider to be most appropriate for the work – this will usually be cheapest unless there is good reason to select another one – and offer grant support based on this. We may seek our own quote to assess the value for money offered by the 3 quotes submitted by the applicant. We may also require that this quote be used as the basis for any actual cost items in the EWCO Agreement.

Payments will be made on completion of the work. Grant Recipients will need to provide evidence that the work is complete with their claim by providing photos and copies of the invoices.

If you want to include support for infrastructure for woodland management in your application you must confirm whether permitted development rights apply to any proposed roading with your local planning authority (and relevant highways authority, as needed) as early as possible. You need to provide evidence of this with your application. Where planning permission is required, you will need to obtain consent before work is undertaken and we may ask to see evidence of this as part of an inspection.

#### 4.3.4 Additional Contributions

Additional Contributions are optional and will be available where the woodland's location and design will deliver public benefits (see Appendix 2 for specific design requirements). These are one-off payments and can be claimed with the final claim for capital work (that is once all the capital works are completed). This includes areas where natural colonisation is used as the establishment method.

Where the location and design of the woodland means that multiple public benefits will be provided, Additional Contributions for different benefits can be stacked on the same area of land.

Additional Contribution eligibility is assessed on a compartment basis. Each compartment claiming an Additional Contribution must satisfy the eligibility for that contribution in its own right.

##### Nature Recovery (either £3,300, £2,800 or £1,100 per hectare)

This Additional Contribution will help woodland-dependent priority species to recover. There are 3 rates for this Additional Contribution. These cannot be stacked on the same area and where the highest rate touches the compartment or block, the highest rate will apply (unless creating woodland for red squirrels). The rate that applies will depend on the location, objective and composition of the new woodland:

- premium rate (£3,300): available where the new woodland will expand areas of existing ancient woodland with new native woodland
- higher rate (£2,800): available where the new woodland will expand areas of existing native woodland with new native woodland
- lower rate (£1,100): available where the new woodland will create areas of new native woodland or will expand habitat for red squirrel populations

This Additional Contribution will be awarded on the following basis.

##### Spatial targeting

Proposed woodland meeting the design requirements must:

touch the Premium Spatial Priority Area in the '**EWCO - Nature Recovery - Priority Habitat Network**' layer for the premium rate

touch the High Spatial Priority Area in the '**EWCO - Nature Recovery - Priority Habitat Network**' layer for the higher rate

touch either the Lower Spatial Priority Area in the '**EWCO - Nature Recovery - Priority Habitat Network**' layer or the '**EWCO Biodiversity - Priority species - Red Squirrel - Woodland Creation**' layer for the lower rate. If your proposal is

not within the latter spatial area, we will accept confirmation of a benefit from Red Squirrel Northern England.

You can check the location of the woodland in relation to these layers on the [Forestry Commission's map browser and Land Information Search](#).

### **Species mix**

30% of the species mix must be made up of small trees and woody shrubs (eligible species are noted in the species list tab of the EWCO Application Form).

Unless you are planting to expand habitat for red squirrel, the planting must be as follows:

- at least 80% of the total species mix must be native
- up to 20% of the species mix can be non-native, naturalised or 'advancing' (native elsewhere in Britain), or 'honorary' natives (broadleaves native to northwest Europe and expected to be adapted to conditions in the near-future climate)
- minimum of 5 native species – no more than 50% of the species mix allocated to a single species
- 30% of the planting mixture must be made up of the small trees and woody shrubs listed in the EWCO Application Form
- faster growing non-native species can be included as a small component (less than 20%) if planted as a fail-safe mixture. A fail-safe mixture is a predominantly native broadleaved stand will be produced in the event of no further management. This can be achieved by planting faster growing non-native species either singly or in small individual groups of three to five trees scattered intimately throughout the predominantly native broadleaved area

If you are planting the woodland to expand habitat for red squirrel you must apply the design requirements specified in Appendix 2.

### **Stocking density**

At least 1,600 stems per hectare is required. Lower stocking may be agreed for woodland edges, upslope for visual landscape fit, and where this will benefit black grouse, or any other Protected Species or Habitat (where present). Closer spacing may be used where timber quality is important, this will also accelerate canopy closure to provide earlier opportunities for specialist woodland plants and animals to colonise. Open space must follow the following guidelines:

<5 ha block – min. 10% but flexibility 0 – 20%\*  
>5 ha block – min. 20% but flexibility 10 – 40%\*

*\*in agreement with Woodland Officer*

### Water Quality (£500 per hectare)

Available where woodland creation is in catchments that are in moderate or poor water quality status, where woodland can help reduce pollutants through land use change that reduces fertilizer application or by creating woodland that intercepts pollution and sediment before it reaches watercourses. This Additional Contribution will be awarded on the following basis:

#### **Spatial targeting**

Proposed woodland meeting the design requirements must touch a High Priority area 'EWCO Water – Water Quality' layer on the [FC's map browser and Land Information Search](#). If your proposal is not within this spatial area, we will accept confirmation of a benefit from the local flood authority or Catchment Sensitive Farming Advisors. This should be discussed and agreed with your Woodland Officer initially, who will facilitate discussion with the relevant authority.

#### **Species mix**

UKFS compliance with no one species more than 50% of the mixture for climate adaptation. Productive broadleaf or conifer species will provide the greatest benefits for water, but larger scale planting of conifers should be avoided where water resources are an issue. Up to 30% of the species mix can be made up of small trees and woody shrubs.

#### **Stocking density**

Minimum of 1,100 stems per hectare with closer spacing recommended across runoff pathways (higher stocking may be required to also secure the Nature Recovery Additional Contribution) and a maximum of 20% open space.

#### **Ground preparation**

Plan to install drains at the same time or immediately after cultivation operations. Ensure that existing field drains and new drains are aligned so that water is discharged slowly into buffer areas and not directly into watercourses. Stop drains at the edge of buffer areas, preferably on flat ground where water can fan out.

### Flood Risk Management (£1,000 per hectare)

Available where areas of appropriately designed new woodland in the right location can help reduce the risk of flooding. This Additional Contribution will be awarded on the following basis:

### **Spatial targeting**

Proposed woodland meeting the design requirements must touch either 'Opportunity for Floodplain Woodland' or 'Opportunity for Wider Catchment Woodland' in the '**EWCO Water – Flood Risk Management**' layer on the [FC's map browser and Land Information Search](#). If your proposal is not within this spatial area, confirmation of a benefit from the Lead Local Flood Authority or Catchment Sensitive Farming Advisors will be accepted, for example inclusion within a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. Applications involving cross slope or run-off prevention woodland will be verified and advised upon by Catchment Sensitive Farming Advisors. This should be discussed and agreed with your Woodland Officer initially, who will facilitate discussion with the relevant authority.

### **Species mix**

UKFS compliance with no one species being more than 50% of the mixture for climate adaptation. Broadleaf or conifer species can be used, and a complex mix of species are effective in order to deliver a complex canopy structure, with broadleaves along watercourses (see Riparian Buffers below). Up to 30% of the species mix can be made up of small trees and woody shrubs. In the wider catchment standard EWCO planting requirements apply.

### **Stocking density**

Minimum of 1,100 stems per hectare (higher stocking may be required to also secure the Nature Recovery Additional Contribution) and a maximum of 20% open space (with the exception of a standard requirement of 40% in riparian buffers) in the floodplain. Higher stocking and lower levels of open space away from the watercourses are recommended to increase hydraulic roughness and water to infiltration. In the wider catchment standard EWCO planting requirements apply.

### **Ground preparation**

There will be no pre-planting drainage or land preparation work that creates new ditches or drains, or that would increase drainage to an existing watercourse, including permanent sub-soil drains. Sub-soiling as a cultivation method may be permitted where it is required for successful tree establishment and help vertical drainage by breaking any plough or iron pan. Cultivation must be cross-slope and comply with: [UKFS Practice Guide on Managing Forestry Operations to Protect the Water Environment](#).

Where appropriate, show that any new or existing field and forest drainage within your proposal meets UKFS good practice guidelines and is designed to reduce flood risk. Ensure that existing field drains are disconnected so that water is discharged slowly into buffer areas and not directly into watercourses. Disconnect existing drains at the edge of buffer areas, preferably on flat ground where water can fan out. In some instances, it may be appropriate to include other run-off attenuation features (for example, swales

and scrapes) into the open space design of the woodland. The positive benefits of these should be agreed in advance with the appropriate flood authority but remain outside the funding requirements, payments and permissions of EWCO.

### Riparian Buffers (£2,500 per hectare)

Available where woodland creation with native broadleaved species will provide the dappled shade that will improve aquatic ecology by reducing summer water temperatures and benefiting wildlife dispersal (for example, otter) along the corridors of habitat this creates. This Additional Contribution will be awarded along watercourses only. Any ditches or drains that are buffered on the spatial targeting layer will not be eligible for the payment.

Areas of this Additional Contribution should be mapped as separate compartments in the application map. This Additional Contribution will be awarded on areas up to 50 metres from either bank of the watercourse on the following basis:

#### **Spatial targeting**

Proposed woodland meeting the design requirements will be planted within 10 metres of the watercourse's bank and within the '**EWCO - Keeping Rivers Cool**' layer on the [FC's map browser and Land Information Search](#). Only the area fully within the targeting layer is eligible for the Additional Contribution and this must be mapped as a separate compartment.

#### **Species mix**

Native species (excluding advancing or honorary native species) to provide dappled shade and ensure that the seed of invasive tree species are not transported by watercourses. Up to 30% of the species mix can be made up of small trees and woody shrubs. We will allow up to 15% Scots pine where this will preserve the presence of Scots pine in the immediate area. Scots pine planting stock must be of native provenance.

#### **Stocking density**

1,100 stems per ha and a standard requirement of 40% open space to create woodland that provides 50% dappled shade at the riverbank. The areas on which the Riparian Buffer Additional Contribution is applied for must be mapped as a separate compartment.

#### **Ground preparation**

No pre-planting drainage or land preparation work that creates new ditches or drains, or that would increase drainage to an existing watercourse, including sub-soil drainage should be carried out in riparian or groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems buffer zones. You should avoid using tree guards in riparian zones where there is a risk that

they could be washed away in flood events. Plan to install drains at the same time or immediately after cultivation operations. Ensure that existing field drains and new drains are aligned so that water is discharged slowly into buffer areas and not directly into watercourses. Stop drains at the edge of buffer areas, preferably on flat ground where water can fan out.

Where the Riparian Buffer Additional Contribution is applied for in conjunction with any other Additional Contribution, the woodland design should meet the design requirement for the Riparian Buffers within the spatial target area for the Riparian Buffer. The area within the Riparian Buffer will attract each of the relevant Additional Contributions. Outside the Riparian Buffer the appropriate design requirements must be met.

Areas of land applying for the Riparian Buffer Additional Contribution must be mapped as a separate compartment and allocated a separate line in the EWCO Application Form.

### Close to settlements (£600 per hectare)

Available where woodland creation will provide social and environmental benefits by being close to people. This Additional Contribution will be awarded on the following basis:

#### **Spatial targeting**

Proposed woodland meeting the design requirements touches the '**EWCO - Nfc Social**' layer in the [FC's map browser and Land Information Search](#).

#### **Species mix**

UKFS compliance with no one species more than 50% of the mixture for climate adaptation. Broadleaf or conifer species effective, with broadleaves along watercourses (see riparian buffer Additional Contribution). Up to 30% of the species mix can be made up of woody shrubs.

#### **Stocking density**

Minimum of 1,100 stems per ha.

### Recreational Access (£3,700 per ha)

Available where the woodland meets the requirements of the 'Close to settlements' Additional contribution and permissive access for recreation on foot will be provided on land that does not currently have access to it, for at least 30 years. Access must be allowed during daylight hours for 365 days per year.

To be eligible for the Access Additional Contribution, permissive access must be offered over the whole area (that Additional Contributions are applied for) in conjunction with the creation of a path network, including linking to existing Public Right of Way (PRoW), to be agreed with the Woodland Officer.

Applicants applying for the Additional Contribution for Access must provide an Access Map showing the routes which will be created to facilitate permissive access on foot and where signage is to be located.

Recipients of this Additional Contribution will need to advertise that there is access to the site through, for example, waymarkers or signage at entry points, and online maps. The promotion can be physical or digital but must be agreed with us and installed prior to claiming the Grant.

If you are outside the '*EWCO – NfC Social*' targeting layer you can set out why you feel the proposal should be eligible for the Additional Contribution by filling in a [EWCO Public Access – Non-spatial eligibility form](#).

### Ammonia Capture

There is no Additional Contribution for ammonia capture, but EWCO supports action to address air pollution. Additional points are therefore available for creating shelterbelts designed to capture ammonia emissions from farm sources (for example, livestock buildings, slurry stores, composting site, free-range poultry, or pigs). This applies in locations where there is a potential risk of air pollution impacting a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – where sensitive habitats or species could be impacted by direct toxic effects of ammonia, nitrogen deposition or acidification from ammonia emissions.

Points for this benefit will be awarded on the following basis:

#### **Spatial targeting**

Proposed woodland meeting the design requirements touches the '*EWCO – NfC Ammonia emissions capture for SSSI*' layer in the [FC's map browser and Land Information Search](#).

#### **Species mix**

The backstop planting should include a proportion of conifers, whilst the main body of the planting should include faster growing tree species with a large leaf area to achieve benefit as quickly as possible. See Appendix 2 for more detail. Up to 20% of the species mix can be made up of woody shrubs.

#### **Stocking density**

Backstop planting at a minimum of 2,500 stems per ha (the maximum stocking density that will be funded under EWCO), and main planting at a minimum of 1,100 stems per ha. See Appendix 2 for more detail.

### 4.3.5 Low Sensitivity Land Payment

The Low Sensitivity Land Payment is paid at the rate of £1,100 per ha and is optional. It will be available where the woodland's location falls within a low sensitivity area for



woodland creation, aligned with the [Woodland Creation Fast Track](#) criteria (see [Section 4.9.1](#)).

Low sensitivity areas are where there are likely to be fewer sensitivities or constraints to woodland creation. They can be viewed using the 'England Woodland Creation Low Sensitivity Map version 4.0' layer on the [Land Information Search \(LIS\)](#).

We may at our discretion allow a proportion of the application to be outside the low sensitivity area, if this is required for good woodland design. This may be allowed if: up to 10% of the application is outside the low sensitivity area  
the only sensitivity outside is the land's agricultural grade

The 'England Woodland Creation Low Sensitivity Map version 4.0 variant 3' on the [LIS](#) allows you to check whether your proposal falls within the second criteria point.

Read our [guide to woodland creation sensitivity maps](#) to find out more about the different map variants and what they show.

#### 4.3.6 Private finance

Additional Contributions are payments that recognise the public benefits the new woodlands will provide. They are optional and stackable, and applicants are encouraged to pursue private finance in place of the relevant Additional Contribution(s).

You can opt out of an Additional Contribution to take offers of private finance at any point until the Additional Contribution is claimed. You can let us know if you wish to do this in your final capital claim form but letting us know as soon as possible will help us reallocate the budget. After the Agreement Obligation Period ends, Grant Recipients can seek private finance for those benefits previously supported through Additional Contributions, subject to being able to demonstrate relevant natural capital market entry requirements.

To access private finance markets for ecosystem services, proposals will need to meet any additionality requirements that may be required for an investment to be made. This is a matter for applicants and Grant Recipients to agree with private investors, or with validation bodies where seeking certification under a code of practice. Opting out of the relevant Additional Contribution(s) that private finance will support or buy will help meet additionality requirements.

There is no mechanism for repaying Additional Contributions once they have been claimed in order to access private finance. However, if private finance is found to have been taken for a particular public benefit after we have paid the relevant Additional Contribution(s), we will investigate and reclaim this portion of the Grant payment.

EWCO makes no Additional Contributions for carbon. However, the EWCO Application Form supports registration with the [Woodland Carbon Code](#) (WCC) to access private funding for 'Woodland Carbon Units' and the [Woodland Carbon Guarantee](#) (WCaG). The WCaG offers opportunities for guaranteed government payments for Woodland Carbon Units captured by your project at an agreed price.

Registration for the WCC is voluntary, but we strongly encourage applicants to provide the necessary information in the EWCO Application Form if they are interested in registering. By doing this the EWCO Application Form will generate a WCC summary which the applicant can use to easily transfer information to the WCC calculator. You need to register your project with the WCC before it is planted.

We will review EWCO's Additional Contributions and may withdraw them as markets for other public benefits develop and make private finance more readily available. For further information on rules for combining EWCO payments with other sources of payment for ecosystem services, see [Operations Note 62](#).

## 4.4 Support for natural colonisation

Natural colonisation is a woodland creation technique that relies on natural processes to create woodland. This is also sometimes referred to as natural regeneration. Both terms refer to woodland expansion through natural processes.

EWCO supports natural processes as a means of establishing new woodland. Both natural colonisation and natural regeneration techniques are supported, but for ease EWCO will refer to woodland expansion through natural processes throughout the Grant documentation as natural colonisation.

Subject to your Woodland Officer's discretion, natural colonisation may be supported by EWCO on areas of land within 75 metres of a viable seed source of at least 2 tree species. Where necessary, the proposal can be supported by advice from a Forestry Commission ecologist or Natural England Advisor. We may, in exceptional circumstances, agree to this distance being extended.

Non-native species in appropriate locations would qualify for support for natural colonisation, for example to support the expansion of plantations or create mixtures of native and exotic species. Ash will be treated as a viable species as the natural colonisation of ash will allow the establishment of resistant genotypes.

Details on the requirements that must be met for EWCO to support natural colonisation and how it will be monitored can be found in Appendix 5.

## 4.5 Scoring applications

Your application will be assessed through a scoring process. You are responsible for filling in the score form in the EWCO Application Form. Points are awarded for:

- **woodland design for climate change adaptation** – points determined at proposal-level
- **using private finance in place of Additional Contributions** – points determined at proposal-level
- **size** – points determined at proposal-level
- **the public benefits your application will provide** – points determined at block or compartment level, depending on whether the block or compartment does both of the following:
  - meets the minimum design requirements
  - touches the spatial layer or area on the Land Information Search

Points are available where the following public benefits will be provided due to the woodland location and design (see [Section 4.3.4](#) and Appendix 2):

- nature recovery
- natural flood risk management
- water quality
- riparian buffers
- being close to settlements
- providing recreational access
- where the woodland will enable support ammonia capture in areas that could protect Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Because scoring is affected by location, you will need to identify the area of the application that is touching the areas where woodland creation – of the right design – can deliver the public benefit. You can check this using the [FC's map browser and Land Information Search](#). The data layers you need to check for each Additional Contribution are set out in Section 4.3.4.

If you wish to score points for either natural flood risk management or water quality outside of the targeting layer, you will need to provide a letter of support from a Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer or the Environment Agency.

The size of the proposal will affect the score. Larger proposals will score higher because of the greater benefit they offer. However, the total score for a proposal is averaged over the application areas to enable a comparison of smaller and larger proposals.

An initial application needs to reach the minimum threshold score (see [Section 2.3](#)) to be eligible for further processing and the final application must also achieve this number of points to be offered an Agreement.

## 4.6 Application maps

You need to provide a map that shows all areas of proposed woodland creation and associated capital items with your application. If your application is successful and we offer you an Agreement, the map you sent with the application will become the 'Agreement Map', so it needs to be clear, legible and meet the standards in [Section 6](#).

## 4.7 Authorising an agent

You can complete the application and make a claim yourself or authorise an agent to do so on your behalf.

If an agent will be acting on your behalf to complete an application or claim forms, you need to give them the appropriate permission levels by completing an [Forestry Commission Agent Authority Form](#). If you have already authorised your agent to act on your behalf with us and wish these existing permissions to apply to your EWCO application, you need to confirm this on your EWCO Application Form.

## 4.8 Restrictions on agricultural activity in woodland areas

You cannot use any land subject to a EWCO Agreement for any agricultural activity (regardless of when the trees are established) because this is the point at which land is set aside for non-agricultural use. You must submit an RLE1 to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) form to notify them and register the land as a permanent non-agricultural area with an effective date of 1 January the year following the Agreement Commencement Date.

Providing you meet all eligibility requirements you can continue to claim delinked payments on land in the EWCO Agreement. If applicable, you will be required to take action to continue to correctly claim delinked payments after tree planting.

## 4.9 How we process your application

Before we can offer an Agreement, a Forestry Commission Woodland Officer must visit your site to review the application with you. They will check that the woodland design is appropriate and meets the UK Forestry Standard and check that the items you applied for are suitable.

We will publish the proposals on the [public registers for consultation on forestry projects](#) to make sure the local community knows about and can comment on the proposals to create new woodland. We will also consult with any statutory consultees (organisations that must be notified or provide consent for the proposal).

This means that it may take 3 to 5 months for us to process your application. Timescales vary because each application is different, but we will process your application as quickly as possible. If you have already created a Woodland Creation Design Plan through the Woodland Creation Planning Grant (see section 4.1.2) timescales are likely to be shorter. An application that requires consent or agreement from other parties because of potential impacts on designated sites or that includes actual cost support for woodland infrastructure can take longer. During peak periods of work, it may take longer for us to process your application.

Preparing a detailed Woodland Creation Plan based on prior engagement with key stakeholders will help us to process your application. [Contact your Forestry Commission Area Team](#) as early as possible to receive advice and guidance to develop your application and understand how long it will take for us to process it.

Site visits needed as part of the application process can be carried out before you submit your initial application. We recommend a joint site visit between you and your Woodland Officer and any relevant statutory bodies if the application may need consent or agreement from other parties.

If your application is successful, we will offer you a EWCO Agreement once we have completed the final checks and confirmed the threshold score has been met or exceeded (see [Section 2.3](#)). If your application is unsuccessful, we will let you know as soon as possible and why it has not been unsuccessful.

### 4.9.1 Woodland Creation Fast Track

If your application is eligible for [Woodland Creation Fast Track](#), we will aim to process it within the indicated timeframe. You can learn more about Woodland Creation Fast Track and check eligibility criteria on the [GOV.UK page](#).

## 4.10 Your Agreement Commencement Date

The Agreement will start on the date you sign your Grant Offer Acceptance Letter (the Commencement Date).

We sometimes make **In Principle** offers to provide applicants with confidence that a EWCO offer is available to them so they can release the land from an existing CS or ES agreement. The land must be free of commitments under CS or ES before we can offer and start the EWCO agreement. Acceptance of an **In Principle** Grant Offer will not start

your agreement. You will need to wait to receive (and accept) a formal Grant Offer which we will provide as soon as possible after an **In Principle** Grant Offer is accepted.

The annual Maintenance Payments element of your Agreement and the Obligation Period will begin once your final capital and Additional Contribution claim has been paid.

## 5 How to apply

To apply you need to take the following steps.

### 5.1 Register with the Rural Payments service

You must be registered on the [Rural Payments service](#) before you can apply to EWCO. Once you are registered, you will receive a Customer Registration Number (CRN), a Firm Reference Number (FRN) and a Single Business Identifier (SBI). Your SBI must be supplied where specified in the EWCO application. This is to conduct due diligence checks on all applications and to enable payments. If you want to direct your EWCO payments to an authorised agent, they must also be registered on Rural Payments. All parties included in the application must also be listed under the SBI on Rural Payments, so that we can identify them (this includes any agents).

Please be aware that should confirmation of any applicant or agent's identity be required at any point during the application process, they must still be able to provide a valid CRN. Your CRN can be accessed through your Personal Details section of your Rural Payments account on [www.ruralpayments.service.gov.uk](http://www.ruralpayments.service.gov.uk), or by contacting the Rural Agency by either:

- email: [ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk)
- phone: 03000 200 301

You must also have registered your land on the [Rural Payments service](#) before we can offer you an Agreement. To enable this, we advise applicants to register their land before making an application.

If the land is already registered on the Rural Payments service, its land use and boundaries may need to be updated to reflect the new woodland. You will need to fill in an RLE1 form and send it to RPA to do this. The use of marker posts or stones may be needed when splitting land parcels for woodland creation before planting or fence lines are put in place. You can find guidance on splitting land parcels including marking permanent boundaries to split land parcels at [RLE1 form and guidance](#). The land must be linked to the lead applicant's SBI before we can offer an agreement.

### 5.1.2 Rural Payment Service Full Verification

All lead applicants and agents (if authorised to claim grant payments) must be verified on the Rural Payments Service to confirm their identity before we can complete our eligibility checks on your EWCO application.

Under 'People and permissions' of your business on the Rural Payments Service, we will check whether there is a 'More information required' next to the name of the lead applicant and agent of the scheme. If so, we will ask you to amend this by contacting the Rural Payments Service by either:

- email: ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk
- phone: 03000 200 301

We are only able to proceed with the processing of your application once this notification is resolved, or if we have been provided with evidence showing this amendment is currently being processed.

## 5.2 Complete your application

Before making your application, please read the [Grant Funding Agreement Terms and Conditions](#). You will need to confirm you have read and understand the Terms and Conditions for us to consider your application.

To make an application you will need to complete and submit:

- EWCO Application Form and Declaration Form
- an Application Map showing where the woodland creation will take place (see [Section 6](#) for details)
- any quotes and supporting documents if you are applying for contributions towards infrastructure for woodland management or recreation
- where applicable, EWCO Common Land and Supplementary Grazing Form
- where applicable, EWCO Natural Colonisation Initial Site Assessment Form for each application area in which natural colonisation will be the method of establishing trees

You will need to have the necessary permissions or consent in place before you carry out any work and provide evidence of this if we request it to support an inspection. You do not need to provide it with your application.

You must complete your application in English and the value of any quotes you provide must be in sterling. If you do not complete a question or make the required declarations in the EWCO Declaration Form, or if you provide an answer that shows your application is not eligible for EWCO, we will reject your application.

We will accept additional documents that support your application, but you must make their purpose and link to the application clear. We also reserve the right to request further information to support your application where we feel this is required (for example, to support an application for actual costs support for infrastructure).

You can get the application forms on GOV.UK: [England Woodland Creation Offer application form](#).

If you are unable to download the forms, please contact us by email at [EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk) or by post:

England Woodland Creation Offer – EWCO  
Forestry Commission  
National Office, England  
620 Bristol Business Park  
Coldharbour Lane  
Bristol, BS16 1EJ

### 5.2.1 Confidentiality

If any elements of your application should be treated as confidential, please let us know. You can do this with an additional document supporting your application, setting out which information is confidential and why.

## 5.3 Submitting your application

You can apply to EWCO throughout the year. You should email your completed application forms and supporting documents to [EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk) or you can contact us by post at the address above.

## 5.4 Working with us on your application

We will carry out checks to make sure your application is complete and eligible. If it is incomplete, we will contact you to request the additional information. We will also check the application score meets or exceeds the threshold score – see [Section 2.3](#).

If these checks are passed, a Forestry Commission Woodland Officer will visit your site and carry out consultation and assessment. They will agree any changes to your application with you. This will be recorded in a final version of the EWCO Application Form, which will form part of any subsequent EWCO Agreement along with the EWCO Grant Funding Agreement Terms and Conditions and Agreement Map.



## 5.5 Accepting your Agreement

Once the final proposal is agreed and documented in the final version of the EWCO Application Form and all consents and permissions are in place, we will write to you to offer you an EWCO Agreement. You can accept or reject the Agreement offer by signing the Acceptance Letter and returning it to us using the contact details in [Section 5.2](#). We will accept wet signatures and Qualified Electronic Signatures (QES) for your final agreement. If you accept the Agreement, you will be confirming that you have read, understand and accept the EWCO Grant Funding Agreement Terms and Conditions.

If you accept the Agreement, you have 3 years to complete the capital works. You will then have a further 3 months in which to claim for the capital works. Details of the Agreement requirements and its management are in [Section 7](#).

## 5.6 Where to get help

Forestry Commission Woodland Officers provide technical advice on woodland creation applications. You can also contact your local Woodland Officer for pre-application and technical advice before you make your application. Your Woodland Officer will give you advice and let you know if you need to provide more information with your application and will work with you to provide technical advice after you have submitted your initial application. You can find contact details on our [office access and opening times](#) GOV.UK page.

## 5.7 Getting consent

It is your responsibility to get all consents, approvals or permissions that you may need to carry out the work funded under your Agreement. These consents, approvals and permissions must remain effective for the duration of the Agreement and we may ask for evidence of this. Appendix 3 provides guidance on the types of consent that may be needed and where to obtain this from.

Please note that if you are applying for woodland infrastructure you will need to check with the local planning authority and relevant highways authority (if applicable) if permitted development rights apply to any woodland infrastructure you wish to include in your application. This will determine if full planning consent is needed, and which authority (Local Planning Authority or the Forestry Commission) will be responsible for a decision on whether consent is needed under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. You will need to send evidence of the planning authority's position on woodland infrastructure with your application.

### 5.7.1 Other considerations

When you carry out work under the Agreement, remember that you must not breach any other rules or laws, such as:

- breaking byelaws
- obstructing public rights of way
- blocking or restricting access to 'open access' land
- affecting oil or gas pipelines
- breaching your cross-compliance requirements in relation to any other existing commitments you hold, where applicable (for example, if you claim BPS payments)

## 5.8 Withdrawing your application

You can withdraw your application at any time by sending an email or writing to us using the details in [Section 5.2](#). Please explain the reason(s) why you are withdrawing your application. This feedback will help us improve EWCO and our service.

If you wish to remove part of the land from your application, please either:

- email or write to us at the address in [Section 5.2](#) if you have not yet been contacted by a Woodland Officer about your application
- notify your Woodland Officer if you are already working with them on your application

## 5.9 Disputes, appeals and complaints

If you are unhappy with a decision we have taken about your application or Agreement, you can make an appeal. If you are unhappy with the service you have had from the FC, you can email, write or call us. Full guidance about how to make a complaint or appeal is available on our [Complaints Procedure GOV.uk page](#).

## 6 Mapping Standards

### 6.1 Preparing a map for your application

A map showing all areas of proposed woodland creation and associated capital items must be provided with your EWCO application. If the application is successful and you are offered an Agreement, the map supplied with the application will become the 'Agreement Map'. It therefore needs to be clear, legible, and meet the standards set out below (see Section 6.3). Please note that applicants will be responsible for providing updated maps following any agreed changes to the proposed Agreement or capital items.

### 6.2 How to create a map

You can use your own map if it meets the standards in Section 6.3, or you can use a base map requested through the [Forestry Commission's Map Request Service](#). If you use this service, the Forestry Commission will supply a blank base map for you to mark up by hand to show your proposal.

If you need a map from our Map Request Service, please request it as early as possible. We will supply base maps to applicants either by post or email.

### 6.3 Minimum mapping standards

When creating an Application Map, you must comply with the following rules:

- the map must show all the land on which the woodland creation works and items will be undertaken
- the boundary of the site must be clearly marked by a coloured line – this must encompass the entire area included within the application
- any (sub)compartments must be labelled with a reference that matches the (sub)compartment reference provided in the EWCO Application Form
- the location of the proposed work must be shown and marked with a coloured line or shaded/hatched area with the capital items listed next to them or in a legend - this includes proposed planting areas and must show any fence lines and the type of fence
- any proposed areas of open space within the proposed planting areas must be shown
- distinct areas of different planting prescriptions (species mix and or stocking density for example) should be indicated on the map
- the Single Business Identifier (SBI) and property or site name (as detailed on the application form) must be shown
- include a six-figure OS grid reference for the centre of the map

- if you make a mistake, you should strike through instead of using correction fluid
- the map number and the total number of maps (for example, '1 of 3') must be visible and if more than one map is required, an overview map of the entire scheme must be provided
- we will not accept screenshots from internet map browsers such as Google Maps as base maps
- areas that include the Riparian Buffers Additional Contribution should be mapped as separate compartments

Further maps with additional detail can be provided to support an application (and we may request them if needed). These maps should be based on an appropriate OS map (the [Forestry Commission Map Request Service](#) can be used if needed) or GIS-generated digital map. Maps must be based on a scale of 1:2,500 or 1:5,000, or for large schemes 1:10,000.

These might show the following:

- planting design – showing species
- watercourses and open water
- an Access Map – a map showing the routes where permissive access by foot will be offered and where signage promoting permissive access will be installed plus any date on which access may be suspended (this should be submitted with any application that includes the Additional Contribution for recreation and will be included in the Agreement Map(s) that form part of the Agreement)
- open space map – identifying features that justify or support internal open space, for example Public Right of Way, rides or tracks, or wayleaves.

## 7 Scheme requirements and Agreement management

You must read and meet the requirements detailed in this section as these are mandatory for all EWCO Grant Recipients. 'Grant Recipient' means the person (whether an individual, company or other entity) who has entered into the EWCO Agreement as defined in the Grant Funding Agreement.

### 7.1 Entering into an Agreement

If your application is successful, we will send you a Grant Offer Letter. If you want to accept your EWCO Agreement, you must return the signed Acceptance Letter to us within 15 working days of the date of the Grant Offer Letter. If you do not accept your offer within this time, we will withdraw it. The Commencement Date and End of Capital

Funding Date of any EWCO Agreement will be set out in the Grant Funding Agreement Terms and Conditions document and the Grant Offer Letter.

### 7.1.1 Agreement duration

Your Agreement will include:

- 3-year Grant Funding Period for Capital Payments
- the capital period, which will be followed by a 15-year Obligation Period
- a further Grant Funding Period of 15 years is available for annual Maintenance Payments, after the capital period, for those Grant Recipients who wish to make use of it (this will coincide with the Obligation Period)
- where the Agreement includes the Additional Contribution for recreational access, permissive access must be maintained with associated signage for 30 years

You can choose to close a EWCO Agreement early. Where this is to transfer into a future environmental scheme which has the equivalent or increased environmental benefits it will be permitted without penalty at agreed points once you have secured your place in one of those schemes. In other scenarios, we will decide whether to reclaim the payment made so far under the EWCO Agreement. This will be determined by the extent to which the Agreement objectives have been met but the default position will be that the Grant will be repaid.

## 7.2. Agreement amendments

We will consider changes to planting year and works but this will be at our discretion and based on available budget. We make no guarantee that a change will be possible. We may terminate the Agreement, or reclaim or reduce payments, where we consider the changes will not deliver the objectives of the EWCO Agreement. Please read [Appendix 6: agreement amendments and changes of ownership \(successions\) and management](#) for further guidance.

To submit a request for an amendment, use the [Amendments Request Form](#) after reading Appendix 6 and submit this to [EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:EWCO@forestrycommission.gov.uk). Any work conducted outside of a formal agreement will not be funded; please await the amended Grant Offer and sign and return the Acceptance of Grant Offer before undertaking any work relevant to the amendment.

### 7.2.1 Changes of ownership (successions) and management

We may allow successions to EWCO Agreements and accept changes in management control. Part-successions may also be considered as long as this will not result in the Agreement area(s) being smaller than the minimum eligible area.

If we allow a succession or change in management control, we will pay the new landowner the remaining Grant due if they take on and comply with the Agreement. However, we will reclaim any Grant funds paid to the previous owner, even after any land sale, if the Terms and Conditions of the Agreement are not met. If you want to manage this liability, you must put in place an Agreement with the new landowner.

You must notify us of a succession or any change in the management control that may affect the Agreement by completing the Change of Management Control Form after reading Appendix 6, within 3 months of the date that the land sale completes, or within 30 days of a change in management control. If you do not, the EWCO Agreement will be terminated, and the Grant recovered.

At the point of a succession or change of management control, we have the right to terminate the Agreement and may at that time recover the Grant if the objectives of the Agreement have not been met.

## 7.3 Making claims

You should submit a claim to us using the contact details in [Section 5.2](#). Claims for capital work must be made within 3 months of the End of Capital Funding Date unless we agree an amendment to extend the Grant Funding Period. You must have paid for the capital items that you are claiming for, and the payment must have left your bank account before the End of Capital Funding Date. A claim form and corresponding declaration form are available online and can be downloaded from the [EWCO.GOV.UK](http://EWCO.GOV.UK) webpage.

You can make multiple part-claims during the 3-year capital funding period. Any claim you make must be for at least £5,000 unless it is your final claim for outstanding grant, or the total standard costs in your Agreement do not exceed £5,000. You do not need to submit evidence of expenditure for standard costs items, but you must retain a record of this and provide it on request. You must submit evidence of expenditure to support actual costs (infrastructure).

Grant Recipients who submitted their application from 22 June 2022 onwards will be asked to provide details of the tree supplier, along with evidence of compliance with the biosecure procurement requirement (as set out in Section 2.1) in the form of one of the following 3 references:

- Plant Healthy Certification number
- Plant Healthy Applicant number
- RtP Assessment Voucher number

### 7.3.1 Additional Contribution Payments

Once we have received your final claim for capital work, we will check eligibility has been met and pay any Additional Contributions that are included in your Agreement, together with your final capital claim payment.

### 7.3.2 Annual Maintenance Payments

Where appropriate, your final claim for capital work will also trigger the first 5 years of annual Maintenance Payments. This will start automatically, and you do not need to claim for annual Maintenance Payments during the first 5 years. You will need to submit a claim in years 6 and 11 of the Obligation Period to trigger the subsequent 5 years of annual Maintenance Payments.

### 7.3.3 Claim payment timeframes

Claims are paid within 30 working days from receipt of a valid claim. If your claim is returned for missing information or corrections, we will only accept your claim as valid once this has been corrected and returned to us. Any outstanding claims or amendments on your Agreement must have been processed and approved before we begin the processing of any further claims. The clock on further claims will not start until any outstanding claims or amendments have been approved.

Where the Agreement has been selected for inspection, valid claims are paid within 90 working days. Payments will not be made on any part of the Agreement until the inspection has been undertaken and passed.

## 7.4 Inspections

Agreements are subject to inspection to verify that the requirements of the Agreement, including completion of the capital and maintenance work, have been met. This will include inspections during the Obligation Period. We will tell you if your claim is selected for inspection when we confirm your claim has been accepted. You must allow authorised inspectors to access the land under the Terms and Conditions of your Agreement. You will be invited to attend the inspection, but this is not required and we will not change our inspection date to accommodate your availability. This is to ensure your claim can be processed as quickly as possible. You will be asked to sign the inspection report to confirm you have seen results.

## 7.5 Evidence and record keeping

The following table summarises the evidence you will need to supply to support your EWCO application or claim, when this is required, whether you need to retain a record, and for how long.

| <b>Evidence</b>  | <b>Checks</b>  | <b>Record keeping</b>   |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Evidence of expenditure</b> (for example, invoices, till receipts, bank statements, delivery notes, evidence of using your own labour)</p> | <p>You must submit evidence of expenditure to support claims for actual cost capital items (infrastructure).</p> <p>You do <b>not</b> need to submit evidence of expenditure to support claims for the standard cost items (listed in Appendix 1), but you must provide this if we ask you to. If you do not have evidence of expenditure, such as receipted invoices, you must provide a signed <a href="#">EWCO Evidence Declaration form</a> explaining why this is not available.</p> <p>Please see <a href="#">Section 4.3.1</a> for information about when we will accept claims for capital items purchased prior to the Agreement Commencement Date. Note: any final ordering and payment of materials prior to the Agreement Commencement Date is done so at the sole risk of the applicant and <b>Forestry Commission will not accept liability for these items.</b></p> <p>Where required, invoices should clearly show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• name and contact details of the supplier</li> <li>• information to identify the customer, such as name and address of the customer</li> <li>• date when the document was issued</li> <li>• product or service name or description</li> <li>• quantity of products (including the number of trees according to species) or services sold</li> </ul> <p>Where the works have been undertaken by yourself (for example, growing your own trees or supplying own labour), this must be clearly stated by the claimant and supported with evidence showing the costs incurred (for example, timesheets for labour). If this information is not available you must provide a signed declaration explaining why not.</p> | <p>We will retain this evidence for our records until your obligations under the EWCO Agreement expire.</p> |



| Evidence  | Checks   | Record keeping  |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>Evidence of eligibility for central government departments or their arm's length bodies</b><br/>           – evidence you have notified your HMT Spending Team of the intention to undertake permanent land use change.</p>   | <p>Required to support an application.</p>   | <p>We will retain this evidence for our records until your obligations under the EWCO Agreement expire. To be retained by the public body in line with the public body's record retention policy.</p> |
| <p><b>Evidence of eligibility for Public Bodies</b> – evidence of the decision to put land into a EWCO Agreement land is in line with <a href="#">Managing Public Money</a>, with the land put forward for EWCO not compromising other departmental outcomes and delivery of wider public benefits.</p> | <p>We may ask to see this evidence during our processing of an application or at any time during the Agreement period.</p> | <p>To be kept at least 7 years after the final payment of Grant, or if post payment obligations apply, until your obligations under the EWCO Agreement expire.</p>                                    |

| <b>Evidence</b>   | <b>Checks</b>  | <b>Record keeping</b>   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Evidence of consent to undertake work</b><br>(for example, planning permission for forest roads) | We may ask to see this evidence at inspection.<br><br>You must provide confirmation with your application from the local planning authority of whether planning permission is required for any infrastructure.                     | To be kept for at least 7 years after the final payment of the Grant, or if post payment obligations apply, until your obligations under the EWCO Agreement expire. |
| <b>Photographs of infrastructure for woodland management or recreational access</b>                 | Required to support claims showing installation of infrastructure. Failure to provide this may result in your claim being delayed or withheld.   | We will retain this evidence for our records until your obligations under the EWCO Agreement expire.  |
| <b>Photographs of standard cost items and work</b>  | We may ask for photo evidence of standard costs items or activities to confirm site details. If requested, the photos must be supplied within 15 days. Failure to provide this may result in your claim being delayed or withheld. | We will retain this evidence for our records until your obligations under the EWCO Agreement expire.  |

### 7.5.1 Photographic evidence quality

Requirements apply to digital photographs or those supplied as paper photographs. All photographs must meet the following standards:

- photographs must be in focus and clearly show the relevant capital item or environmental feature
- photograph to identify the environmental feature or capital item(s) concerned – it is your responsibility to have sufficient evidence that the investment or required management has taken place (for example, more than one photograph may be needed where the work exceeds the frame or is not clear from a single photograph)
- where possible, include a significant feature to provide authenticity (for example, ditch, fence, farm building, road, telegraph poles)
- mark the photographed feature's location, and direction from which the photograph has been taken, with an 'X' and an arrow on a copy of a map (or map extract) of the Agreement area
- where scale or continuity is important, include a feature, or introduce one (for example, a quad bike or vehicle, or use a sighting pole – 2 metres high with 50cm intervals marked in red and white) – take pictures consistently from the same spot for before and after photographs of the capital item

Photographs must be sent to us in the following sizes and formats:

- if you send your images by email, please send them as JPEG files
- digital images should not be smaller than 600 x 400 pixels and ideally the image file size should be no larger than 400KB
- printed photographs must be no smaller than 15cm x 10cm

### 7.5.2 Labelling photographs

Label photographs with the Ordnance Survey (OS) National Grid reference and compartment number (or land parcel reference if you use these to manage your land) for the field parcel where the works are taking place. Give the EWCO Agreement reference, the name of the capital work the photo is showing, and the date. If you are sending more than one image, also include the image number.

## 7.6 Publicity requirements

The Terms and Conditions require you to comply with all instructions and guidance relating to acknowledging and publicising the support provided. This includes using any materials or templates which are provided for this purpose.

## 7.7 Force majeure

You may be unable to meet your requirements under the Agreement because of exceptional circumstances.

If this happens, you must write to tell us within 40 working days from the date on which you (or any person authorised to act for you) is in a position to do so.

You will need to provide evidence in writing or by using the form on Gov.uk to show what has happened, and how the event meant you were unable to meet the scheme rules.

Exceptional circumstances may include, but are not limited to following, if you have an issue outside of your control that is not listed here contact us:

- the death or long-term professional incapacity of the Grant Recipient
- a severe natural disaster seriously affecting the holding
- a plant disease affecting part or all the Grant Recipient's trees
- expropriation of all or a large part of the holding (provided that the expropriation could not have been anticipated at the time the application)

The authority will consider the facts to decide whether the Grant Recipient is relieved of all or part of their obligations under the Agreement, or whether all or part of the Grant should be withheld or repaid. If you are aware of the issue when entering into your Agreement, then it is unlikely to fall under force majeure or exceptional circumstance.