



**THE NATIONAL
FOREST**

The National Forest

Changing Landscapes Scheme 2023-24

Guidance Notes 2023 (R16)



The National Forest Changing Landscapes Scheme

Introduction

The National Forest Changing Landscapes Scheme is flexible and offers a generous level of funding to any landowner for the creation of new woodlands and associated habitats.

The Changing Landscapes Scheme (CLS) also funds habitat creation and management based on the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CS) which is run by Defra and its agencies, but which, through the CLS, can be paid for outside this national grant regime. This means that, in addition to new woodland, which must be designed in accordance with Forestry Commission (FC) guidelines and meet the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS), land entered into the CLS may incorporate other habitats including parkland, wood pasture, meadows and unimproved grassland, orchards, hedgerows and wetlands.

The CLS requires competitive bids from landowners, with the elements of the schemes drawn from a standard and publicised working costs menu. For each item there is a prescribed maximum price which will be paid. A CLS application will be judged according to design and content and upon the overall contribution which it will make to National Forest objectives (National Forest Strategy 2014 – 2024).

Please note schemes with reduced plastic impact will be viewed favourably; please consider replacing plastic guarding with other methods.

Eligibility

Any landowner **with land in The National Forest, or close to the boundary**, may apply for the CLS and there are only a few restrictions on eligibility. These include: land which has previously been funded by the former National Forest Tender Scheme, the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS), England WGS (EWGS); land which is under an existing Environmental Stewardship (ES) or Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme; land which is required to be planted to satisfy a planning condition or to fulfil a Section 106 obligation. In addition, applicants will need to be registered on the Rural Land Register at the Rural Payments Agency to obtain a Single Business Identifier number. Further information on this can be found in the CLS Customer and Land Registration Notes guidance leaflet which can be downloaded from the National Forest website.

Other restrictions include:

- Woodland intended for the production of Christmas trees or specifically woodfuel crops grown as short rotation forestry.
- Land that needs be planted to comply with a Felling Licence condition or Restocking Notice following conviction for an offence under the Felling Regulations of the Forestry Act 1967.

If your land is outside the Forest boundary, please get in touch to discuss if we can support your project.

Scheme size

The minimum area of land for a CLS application is 1 hectare, with no upper limit. All schemes must include at least 50% woodland creation (this can include up to 40% open land within the woodland component). Schemes can include multiple sites but in total must add up to a minimum of 1 hectare. Although it is not a requirement to enter CS, all new woodland must be designed and maintained in accordance with it and industry best practice. No planting must occur underneath or in close proximity to overhead powerlines or (minimum of 7 metres required either side of lines before shrubs or coppiced trees are planted). Land which is not planted must be managed in accordance with CS principles and must contribute to wider National Forest Strategy objectives. Any provision made for Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats and species related works must be appropriate and relevant to the location.

The Process

The CLS is operated by the National Forest Company (NFC). The documents required for submission are as follows and can be found on the NFC website¹:

1. **CLS Round 16 Application & Standard Cost Spreadsheet (NFCLS4).**
2. **CLS site design maps.** These must be in colour, either A4 or A3 in size and include a scale, agent's details and clients name, site location, hazards and constraints, pertinent design and landscape features, access points and routes where applicable, detailed planting arrangements, non-woodland components including nature conservation interests, and a key. Digitally produced and georeferenced maps are preferred.
3. **CLS woodland creation map.** This must detail the area of woodland creation, including non-woodland elements funded under CLS. FC maps can be used in the production of site plans, and can be requested online².
4. **Shapefiles or DXF files.** Files must include compartment numbers and should include activity type (e.g. broadleaf planting, native broadleaf planting, parkland, pond creation)
5. **Fire plan.** The Local Authority Fire Services have the statutory responsibility for dealing with all uncontrolled fires, and therefore to ensure that adequate measures are taken for the prevention and suppression of fire, it is recommended that a fire plan is also produced for all woodlands. This plan is to include details of exact locations for access and water supplies and owner contact's information.
6. Where a proposal falls within the River Mease Catchment³, the National Forest Company is required to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) on the impact of the proposal. If your site is within the catchment, please advise the land and forestry team at NFC as soon as possible (ideally before submission of your bid).

If you require assistance with any of the documents, including a different format, please contact forestry@nationalforest.org

¹ <https://www.nationalforest.org/about/grant-opportunities/changing-landscapes-scheme>

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/request-a-map-from-the-forestry-commission>

³ <http://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/OperationalCatchment/3303>

Applicants should submit their bids on the application spreadsheet at the time of making the application. Other than minor amendments resulting from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), FC Public Register consultation, and assessment of the scheme, the contract will be offered immediately following approval of a scheme and will be based upon the actual application that was submitted.

Schemes should normally be completed by the end of February in the planting season following approval. Successful applicants may be able to implement their schemes over two planting seasons should this be necessary, by agreement with the NFC. However, the earlier that works are completed, the sooner a grant will be paid. Interim claims may be permitted and should be discussed with NFC at the earliest opportunity.

Successful CLS applicants will be required to enter into a 10-year contract. It is anticipated that most expenditure will be incurred in years 1-10. The first payment will be made in Year 1 on satisfactory completion of woodland and habitat works in accordance with the contract. This will comprise 80% of the total Year 1 to 10 costs. Where schemes are implemented over two years, payments will be made pro-rata, based on the amount of work that has been completed.

The remaining 20% will be paid in Year 6, subject to annual inspections to ensure that maintenance and contractual requirements have been met.

For planting season 2023/2024 the CLS will close for Round 16 applications on 28th February 2023.

Eligible works

The CLS is based upon a menu of standard costs for which grant aid is available, together with a specified **maximum** cost for each item (either on a one-off or annual basis). These cover all aspects of woodland and habitat creation and subsequent management. They have been based on the schedules used for Countryside Stewardship and previous national agri-environment grants but adjusted to reflect the particular requirements of The National Forest. The NFC undertakes an annual review of costs.

Schemes will not need to include all elements: the CLS is based on “Pick and Mix” according to landowner preference, location and land type. The NFC will assess applications carefully to ensure that no double counting or funding of ineligible works occurs.

The CLS menu of standard costs is part of the application form (NFCLS4) and is available from the NFC website. The CLS Claim Form (NFCLS2) for works completed in Years 1 and 6 is also available online.

Whilst the NFC requires professional input for scheme preparation (see “Funding for Scheme Preparation” below) it does not specify who carries out the work nor does it require invoices. Payment is made on satisfactory completion of the works.

Tax

Grants, which cover the physical costs of woodland creation, are specifically exempt from liability to tax. In this respect all CLS applications which refer to the physical costs of woodland and nature conservation habitat creation would have no taxation liability.

Grant Levels

The level of grant will be different in each case. This depends upon the area of land involved, the features which are included and of course, the amount which is bid for. The NFC will place priority on the quality of the schemes submitted but in a competitive situation, the bid price against the gains provided will also be a factor.

Income Forgone Payments

Due to changes in EU regulations from 2014, we no longer offer income foregone payments to applications for new woodlands that are planted.

Woodland Creation

If it is discovered that the woodland has not been established or maintained as agreed or that the intended use of the land and the woodland has been changed without prior agreement, then the NFC may reclaim all the relevant grants paid and cease to pay further grants on the areas concerned. Applicants thought to be deliberately not abiding by the terms of the contract may be barred from future applications. The woodland will be bound by the conditions set out in the Forestry Act 1967 and the UK Forestry Standard guidelines.

Tree Sourcing

Due to the increased prevalence of tree pests and diseases in the UK and the need for biosecurity, the NFC requires that all trees and shrubs procured through the CLS are UK sourced and UK grown from reputable British tree nurseries. The chain of custody must be verified by the chosen tree nursery/nurseries who supply the plants, with evidence provided as part of the grant claim to the NFC (i.e. suppliers documents).

Exceptions may arise where UK sourced and UK grown stock cannot be used for specific reasons (e.g. for certain commercial or specimen trees or where seed originating from abroad has been grown on in the UK). In such instances the NFC must be made aware prior to the trees being purchased, with reasons stated as to why UK stock cannot be used. The chain of custody for the plants must be similarly evidenced and verified for the grant claim.

The NFC reserves the right to not grant aid schemes that cannot provide the necessary tree sourcing chain of custody evidence.

Funding for scheme preparation

Applicants are required to seek professional help to design, implement and manage their schemes. The NFC will pay a fixed rate sum plus a rate per hectare for advice, scheme design, and submission of a complete and well-considered application. This grant, which relates to the size of the scheme, is **paid direct to the forestry consultant/designer** by the NFC **once the contract has been agreed**. The NFC has a list of consultants and contractors who have carried out work satisfactorily in the past in the Forest, which can be provided upon request.

The NFC Board reserves the right to reject any schemes at the submission stage, should they be deemed substandard or inconsistent with the National Forest strategy. Where a lack of quality is pertinent, such schemes will have displayed a poor concept, failed the assessment process, or provided inadequate content in the application form with poorly presented maps and costings. In these circumstances no design costs will be reimbursed. Multiple applications from the same

agent/landowner for any holding or piece of land in the same year are ineligible, even if the scheme has a number of sites.

In circumstances where otherwise good quality schemes have been submitted but prove to be damaging to existing nature conservation, archaeological or heritage sites, or deny public access without reasonable justification as set out in the CLS scoring assessment, schemes may be reimbursed for design costs but only after all attempts to overcome problems have run their course.

The design payment rates provided, based on scheme size, are maximum amounts and a breakdown of rates and time will be required on agent's and advisor's invoices. It is expected that typical schemes will come in at under the maximum rates. CLS claim forms for agents/consultant's fees are available on the website (NFCLS3).

The maximum rates payable per scheme (+ VAT where applicable) are:

- 1- 5 Hectares: £2,500 + £150 per hectare
- 5-10 Hectares: £3,000 + £150 per hectare
- > 10 Hectares: £3,500 + £150 per hectare

The additional rate per hectare is a **discretionary incentive** to encourage larger high-quality schemes.

Signage

Guidance is being developed regarding the content and style of signs and leaflets and will be made available to successful candidates.

Public Access

By virtue of the eligible works and costs associated with the provision and management of access, schemes with access will receive more funding. Unless there are justified reasons not to have public access, the scheme may be rejected. However, access provided through the CLS cannot be charged for.

Public access may take a number of forms, including footpaths, horse-riding routes and cycle paths. Routes may be mown or surfaced. Access may be formal with dedicated routes (PROW, CROW dedicated areas) or more commonly it can be informal such as permissive access. Landowners may provide permissive access to all or part of their land and may restrict this at specific times of the year, for example to protect ground nesting birds or for land management reasons. Access by arrangement for community use, educational visits and specialist use is permissible. Dedication of land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) is **not** required under the CLS.

Circumstances where access is not provided, but does not adversely affect the assessment of schemes may include:

- nature conservation and habitat creation.
- reasonable privacy and security considerations.
- public safety (e.g. next to roads, railways, waterways and hazardous industrial operations).

- the impracticability of reaching the woodland, due to its isolation, including location factors where there is no potential for connections to existing footpaths, bridleways and roadsides.

NFC & FC Access to CLS Sites

The NFC, FC and their authorised agents' staff maintain the right to visit and inspect CLS sites at any time, subject to reasonable notice. The applicant shall not reasonably restrict access to the CLS site without good cause. NFC and FC will undertake to visit all CLS bid sites to assess their individual merit, prior to approval. Visits to CLS sites will also take place by NFC following the completion of each year's works and at years prior to the payment of the final instalment of grant aid.

Assessment

In addition to meeting the national requirements for woodland creation and habitat creation, set by FC and NE, the NFC will assess CLS applications according to criteria relating to The National Forest Strategy 2014-24 and Delivery Plan. These include:

- new woodland creation and enhancement of the landscape by the incorporation of open ground and other habitats
- landscape impact, based on location and/or the scale of new woodland involved
- the creation and management of wildlife habitats (especially related to the National Forest Biodiversity Action Plan)
- creating opportunities to link existing habitats
- the provision of access for the public, including walkers, cyclists and horse riders
- the provision of specialist access, for recreation, education and conservation use
- the protection or enhancement of existing conservation, heritage and archaeological features
- the provision of opportunities for community involvement
- the provision of site signage, way markers and interpretation
- good silviculture practice and innovation
- the contribution to the development of the woodland economy
- consideration of and contribution to climate change issues

Landscape and design, nature conservation, public access and the scale and quality of design are weighted more strongly in scoring and assessment criteria.

Risk factors will also be considered relating to the need for planning or any other statutory permissions, a reliance on unconfirmed match funding, a requirement for landlord or co-owner agreement, past experience of woodland creation and certainty of securing land ownership by the contract date.

The NFC will operate a scoring system for these criteria, which will be set alongside the bid price to provide a value for money score, which will guide decisions on which schemes are successful, taking into account the competitive process. The NFC Board will ultimately decide the winning schemes and there may be instances where lower scoring schemes are selected, taking account of factors such as the overall funding available, location and the track record of

the applicant. Details of the scoring system will be published by the NFC and made available in hard copy form and as a download from the website.

Appeals

Appeals against unsuccessful bids are not possible. A decision could only be successfully contested under judicial review if it was shown that the NFC did not observe the rules of the CLS when reaching a decision on an application. Unsuccessful applicants will be encouraged to amend their applications and resubmit in a subsequent application. The NFC undertakes to provide feedback on the judging process to all unsuccessful applicants.

Commercial operations

The CLS cannot directly fund commercial operations, but it is possible for applicants to use the woodland and other habitats created through the scheme as a platform for diversification as part of a wider farm or business plan. There are considerable opportunities to obtain support for rural business development under the Rural Development Plan (RDP), administered by Defra for diversification, renewable energy, strengthening woodfuel supply chains, improving the economic value of existing woodlands and water resource management. Whilst double funding will not be permissible, where they wish to do so, applicants are encouraged to use the scheme as part of a wider approach to diversification and business development.

Summary

In summary, the National Forest's Changing Landscape Scheme is a unique and well-funded measure which has been designed to encourage landowners of all kinds to continue the creation of The National Forest. As far as landowners are concerned, it retains many of the attractive features of earlier schemes, namely;

- landowners retain ownership and control of land.
- the CLS can form part of wider, whole farm business plan and diversification proposal.
- the woodlands and habitats created through the CLS can support wildlife, tourism, recreation and woodland economy businesses. Commercial operations cannot be funded by the CLS, but they can sit alongside land entered into the CLS.
- landowners can deal directly with the NFC and can expect the NFC to operate the CLS in a transparent and practical way, recognising landowner needs and, where appropriate, the farming calendar.

In addition, the Changing Landscape Scheme can improve the carbon balance of the land holding and contribute to its long-term value, for this generation and the next.

The National Forest Company

October 2022

For information about the Changing Landscapes Scheme and other woodland creation opportunities, please contact the land and forestry team using the details below:

forestry@nationalforest.org

01283 551211

The Changing Landscapes Scheme Application Process – Round 16 2023/24

1. Commission of a private agent / advisor	Applications open: October 2022 – CLS Round 16
2. Liaison with landowner / NFC over scheme	Winter 2022 - 2023
3. Local and Statutory Consultation, Creation of Site Design Map(s), Fire Plan, Work Plan, and Budget Costs	Winter 2022 - 2023
4. Complete NFC CLS Application and Table of Costs	Winter 2022 - 2023
5. Submit Application, Maps (Site Plan and Woodland Creation), and any supporting documentation to NFC prior to deadline	Submission Deadline: 28 February 2023
6. NFC to carry out EIA and Public Register Consultation	Spring 2023
7. NFC Board to evaluate Schemes and NFC to notify results	Summer 2023
8. Contracts produced and signed for winning bids	Summer 2023
9. Implementation of works	Claim Deadline: 28 February 2024
10. Payment for works completed	Payments: March 2024

Appendix 1: Supporting Notes for Completing the Annex 1 Woodland Creation Table Tab on CLS Application Spreadsheet (NFCLS4)

Column 1: Compartment or Field Identifier

Use a letter and/or number to identify each work area. If parts of your woodland proposals are different in some way (e.g. different land use category, grant type, species mix, planting season and claim year) these should be separated out into different compartments.

The compartments must be clearly shown on the application map(s).

Column 2: Current Land Use

Select what the land is currently used for from the drop-down menu.

Column 3: Compartment Area

Enter the total area of the compartment against all species to allow species area to be auto calculated. The NFC will check areas against the maps.

Column 4: Woodland Category

Select the woodland category from the drop-down menu.

The following sets out the woodland categories with the characteristics and criteria that all planting must fall within. The prescription for each afforested area or compartment must fully fit within a particular category in order for it to benefit from the spacing, shrub and open ground allowances designated for that category. The default categories are Standard or Small Standard.

All percentages are of the grant-aided area.

Woodland Category	Characteristics	Stems / net ha required at establishment	Spacing	% Grant-aided open ground	% Grant-aided woody shrub element
Standard	Wood size is 3.0 ha or more and not one of the other types	2250	Max 2.5m	Up to 20% where fully justified	Max 10%
Small Standard	Wood size up to 2.99 ha and not one of the other types	1100	Max 3.0m	Normally 10%, up to 20% where fully justified	Max 15%
Community	Designed for public access and agreed as an appropriate woodland type for the location	As agreed with NFC; between 1100 and 2250	Max 3.0m	Up to 40% where fully justified	Max 25%

Woodland Category	Characteristics	Stems / net ha required at establishment	Spacing	% Grant-aided open ground	% Grant-aided woody shrub element
Special Broadleaf	Appropriate single species broadleaf trees grown at wide spacing	As agreed with NFC; minimum 100	Max 10m	Normally 10%. Up to 20% where fully justified	0% ⁴
Native⁵	Native species only – an agreed and appropriate native woodland type for the site and location. Planting as per FC Bulletin 112 'Creating New Native Woodland'	1600 (or as required to create habitats)	Max 15m	Up to 40% where fully justified	Max 25%

Column 5: Species

See Tree Species List tab for full list of species.

Enter each species on a separate line. Select from the drop-down menu or enter the code manually. Use OG for open ground which is part of the woodland creation area.

Species group codes can only be used for up to 10% of the area. See below table for codes.

Species	Code	Species	Code	Species	Code
Native Mixed Broadleaves	NBL	Mixed Broadleaves	MB	Other broadleaves not in main list	XB
Native Woody Shrubs	WSH	Mixed Conifers	MC	Other conifers not in main list	XC

NB: Larch only east of M/A42⁶

Corsican Pine is no longer recommended due to risk of Dothistroma Needle Blight⁷

Ash is not currently available for planting due to ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*)

⁴ Shrubs may be planted as additional plants but will not be eligible for grant

⁵ If Native woodland is to be created, also enter the National Vegetation Classification type that best represents the type of native woodland proposed. The NVC type proposed will need to match the drainage of the site, the pH of the soil, the climate and the species range and mix.

⁶ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/ramorum-disease-phytophthora-ramorum/> risk zone 3, https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/5483/Pramorum_risk_zones_Oct11.pdf

⁷ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/dothistroma-needle-blight/>

Column 6: Species Percentage

Enter the percent of compartment occupied by each species.

Please ensure that each compartment adds up to 100%.

Column 7: Stocking Density

Enter the compartment stocking density in trees per hectare.

Column 8: Species Area

Area occupied by species. This will be auto calculated.

Column 9: Number of Trees

Number of trees for each species. This will be auto calculated.

Column 10: Percentage to be Established by Natural Regeneration

If it is intended to encourage and include naturally seeded trees as some part of the established woodland, estimate the proportion of the compartment area to be established in this way. This information ensures that any later inspection can take these additional trees into account.

Column 11: Planting Season

Specify the planting season in which you will carry out the work.

Column 12: Woodland Description and Additional Information

Use this column to note any changes to the Standard Proposals used and to make clear any particular details that help describe the work accurately. Such details might include:

- List of species included in Species Group codes (e.g. MB or WSH)
- A description of how the species will be distributed across the site
- The proposed ground preparation for natural or direct seeding of trees
- Details of public access provisions (e.g., path maintenance, access points, signage etc)

Applicants may also set out their own work specifications in this column rather than nominate standard specifications, but these must include sufficient information to accurately describe the work details.

General details on woodland description and additional information can also be entered.