

Woodland Crofts Benefits Checklist

The creation of woodland crofts is expected to bring a range of benefits to a community and the wider public, as well as to the individual tenants and their families.

Correctly identifying these potential benefits can help plan and develop a project, and demonstrate why the project merits support (whether from the local community, from external funders, or from authorities/regulators such as the local planning department).

The following list highlights a number of potential benefits from woodland crofts, grouped under the usual environmental, economic & social headings. The list is not exhaustive and is intended as a guide only; in many cases a benefit could be considered to contribute under more than one and sometimes all of these headings.

Environmental Benefits

Will the creation of woodland crofts result in:

- Improved woodland management for biodiversity?
- A better age structure of woodland?
- A better species mix in the woodland?
- Visual improvements to the woodland landscape?
- An increase in the woodland area?
- Increased native woodland cover?
- The restoration of ancient woodland (PAWS) sites?
- The creation or restoration of other habitats within the woodland?
- Improved management for key species (eg red squirrel, capercaillie, chequered skipper etc)?
- Improved grazing management?
- Better control of invasive non-native species?
- The adoption of lower impact silvicultural systems? (sometimes known as 'continuous cover (CCF)' or 'alternative to clearfell (ATC)')
- Better protection of watercourses?
- Better protection of soils?
- Better protection & management of archaeology and other cultural resources (eg veteran trees, old pollards, wood pasture etc)?
- Reduced use of herbicides, pesticides or fertilisers?
- Lower carbon management of the woodland? (less fossil fuel use/less disturbance of forest soils/better carbon capture)
- Reduced timber haulage ('timber miles') through increased local utilisation of timber?
- Lower carbon footprint of households of crofters and in the wider community through:
 - Increased/more efficient use of woodfuel or other renewables?
 - Substitution of more energy intensive materials with local timber (eg for housebuilding)?
 - Local production of food and other materials from the woodland?

Economic Benefits

Will the creation of woodland crofts:

- Deliver local economic benefits from more intensive management of the woodland?
- Add (and/or retain within the local economy) more value to timber & woodland products through local processing?
- Ensure more marketable material from harvesting enters supply chains where possible?
- Improve timber quality (and hence value) through increased silvicultural intervention (pruning, selective thinning, respacing etc)?
- Reduce timber transport costs, especially in remote areas with poor infrastructure?
- Minimise the costs of unforeseen events, through the early response available to managers (crofters) in close contact with the woodlands?
- Develop niche markets for new woodland products?
- Encourage the production and marketing of non-timber forest products?
- Stimulate local economic activity through the provision of sites for homes and businesses?
- Increase the supply of processed timber for joinery & construction?
- Reduce costs through local economic co-operation (eg sharing equipment & facilities/purchasing/marketing)?
- Provide an economically viable management solution where access to woodlands is restricted (eg where weight restrictions apply to roads or bridges leading to the wood, or in some island locations)?
- Provide a local & sustainable fuel resource in the face of increasing fossil fuel prices (and volatility)?
- Support the development of woodland-based tourism?
- Diversify the economic value of the woodland (improving economic resilience)?

Social Benefits

Will the creation of woodland crofts:

- Increase the sustainability and resilience of a rural community, particularly one that is remote & fragile?
- Empower a community through control of a local resource?
- Provide the foundation for a community-based social enterprise?
- Provide opportunities for involvement for members of the community, to build social networks, confidence and new skills?
- Increase understanding of woodlands and the ways in which their management can contribute to everyday needs?
- Diversify land tenure & management?
- Improve recreational access to woodlands, increasing mental & physical wellbeing?
- Provide sites for housing & extend communities in areas where sites are in short supply?
- Provide affordable access to woodland to families, to support their livelihoods & lifestyles?
- Provide sites for housing outwith the mainstream property market, controlled by the community?
- Retain young families in a community, helping to support schools and maintain essential services?

- Reduce fuel poverty in a community through the provision of local woodfuel?
- Increase the supply of locally produced food, providing health benefits & community resilience?
- Lead to increased skills and capacity in the local community?
- Strengthen the community through increased co-operation between croft tenants & others?
- Pilot models of low-carbon living which may be relevant to wider society?

Scottish Forestry Strategy

The Scottish Forestry Strategy is the Scottish Government's framework for forestry into the future. Its vision states:

“By the second half of this century, people are benefiting widely from Scotland’s trees, woodlands and forests, actively engaging with and looking after them for the use and enjoyment of generations to come. The forestry resource has become a central part of our culture, economy and environment.”

The Strategy’s core principles are based on sustainable development and social inclusion, achieved through a culture of ‘forestry for and with people’ and delivered in well managed forests and woodlands that integrate effectively with other land uses and businesses.

Activity to achieve the Strategy’s vision and objectives focuses on 7 key themes: climate change; timber; business development; community development; access & health; environmental quality; and biodiversity.

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Almost all the potential benefits of woodland crofts highlighted in the checklist above are directly relevant to the Scottish Forestry Strategy, and it is always useful to refer to this document in presenting woodland crofts proposals to funders and regulatory authorities, amongst others.

As well as the concept of woodland crofts resonating strongly with the Strategy’s overall vision, and being consistent with its principles, the Strategy makes explicit reference to woodland crofts under 2 themes:

KEY THEME 3: Business Development

Contributing to rural development

- *Encourage the establishment of woodland crofts to link housing, local rural livelihoods and woodland management*

and

KEY THEME 4: Community Development

Contributing to quality of life

- *Facilitate the provision of sites for affordable housing, other community facilities and, where applicable, woodland crofts*

The Strategy contains much useful information on forestry issues, in addition to the core detail on objectives and priorities, and will be particularly valuable for those less familiar with forestry. It can be downloaded from www.forestry.gov.uk/sfs.

National Forest Land Scheme

Many communities will be looking to obtain woodland for the creation of woodland crofts through the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS). The NFLS is a scheme through which eligible community groups can apply to acquire (or lease) National Forest Land* for a variety of purposes, including woodland crofts. Full details can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/nfls.

In order to be successful in their bid to buy or lease National Forest Land, communities must satisfy seven criteria. One of these (no.6) requires that the proposal must be in the public interest. The NFLS application form asks for information on this aspect, as well as on the public benefits that will arise from the proposal and how it links to other strategies.

The potential benefits of woodland crofts highlighted in the checklist above, as well as the references contained in the Scottish Forestry Strategy, will therefore be very relevant to an application to the NFLS and should be considered carefully as part of any submission to it.

* National Forest Land consists of the forests, woods, open land and other property owned by Scottish Ministers on behalf of the nation, and managed by Forestry Commission Scotland through its agency Forest Enterprise Scotland.