An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Afforestation Scheme 2023-2027 Document

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October 2024

Amendments

Version	Date of revision	Summary of changes
1.1	23/04/2024	Update to Annex 1, Section 1.10 and 1.12 Update to definition of 'lease' Update to Section 21.2, Eligibility for Basic Income Support for Sustainability
1.2	04/10/2024	Update to Section 10.3, Placement of Site Notices in respect of Afforestation Licence Applications
1.3	22/10/2024	Update to Section 10.3, Placement of Site Notices in respect of Afforestation Licence Applications Update to Annex 1.10, FT10 Continuous Cover Forestry

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Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine
Johnstown Castle Estate
Co. Wexford
Tel. 053 9163400
E-mail forestryappenq@agriculture.gov.ie
Web www.gov.ie/forestry

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Afforestation Scheme 2023-2027 aims to increase the current land area of Ireland under forest cover (11% vs. EU average of 38%) whilst ensuring these climate resilient and healthy forests are managed according to the principles of sustainable forest management.

The new Forest Strategy for Ireland underpins the new Forestry Programme for the period of 2023-2027. The Strategy's overarching objectives are rooted in the three pillars of sustainability - People, Planet and Prosperity. These pillars guide the strategic objectives of the Strategy.

The over-riding objective of the Forest Strategy is to radically and urgently expand the national forest estate on both public and private land in a manner that will deliver lasting benefits for climate change, biodiversity, wood production, economic development, employment and quality of life. The mechanism which will be used to deliver forest expansion in Ireland is the Afforestation Scheme. The Afforestation Scheme will aim to contribute towards climate change mitigation; to produce commercial timber; to provide a sustainable source of roundwood for wood product manufacture; to provide biomass for energy production; to provide sustainable jobs in the rural economy; to increase the area of native forests and purpose-designed recreational and amenity forests; to improve water quality through the planting of protective forests; and to improve and enhance biodiversity within newly established forest. This will be achieved through the provision of financial support for the establishment and maintenance of new forested lands.

1.2 Forests established under this *Scheme* must meet the required silvicultural standards of the Scheme and must be managed in accordance with the principles of sustainable forest management. Beneficiaries must also comply with national and EU legislation, and all circulars, operational and environmental guidelines and other requirements published by the Department. Only projects which receive prior written approval from the Department, and which are undertaken in compliance with the conditions of approval, will be eligible for support. Support will take the form of grants and annual premiums towards the costs of agricultural income foregone, forest establishment, and forest maintenance. Applicants have a responsibility to ensure that forests are maintained according to the rules of the Scheme throughout the period of the contract. This management and maintenance is a condition of continued payment of aid under the scheme.

1.3 The *Scheme* measures will be open to all private and public landowners in Ireland.

1.4 This document should be read in conjunction with:

i. The Forestry Standards Manual (including Appendix 2 for Native Forest Framework), the Environmental requirements for Afforestation and the Land types for Afforestation;
ii. Open Forest Scheme Document 2023;
iii. Any/all circulars amending *Scheme* requirements that are periodically issued by the DAFM/Forestry Division.

1.5 The *Forestry Standards Manual*, *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation*, *Land Types for Afforestation* and various scheme circulars can be downloaded from the Department's website at: www.gov.ie/forestry

2. General Outline and Legal Basis

2.1 The Legal basis for the Scheme is established under Section 6 of the Forestry Act, 2014.

The *Afforestation Scheme 2023-2027* is 100% Exchequer funded under the following legal framework:

i. The European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas.

ii. The Scheme is subject to Council Regulation (EC) No 2015/1589 of 13 July 2015 laying down detailed rules for the application of Article 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (codification) – the **Procedural Regulation** - (Codification of Council Regulation (EC) 659/1999 as amended), which governs the procedure on recovery of aid.

iii. Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid (OJ L 352, 24.12.2013, p. 1) and Commission Regulation (EU) No 717/2014 of 27 June 2014 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid in the fishery and aquaculture sector (OJ L 190, 28.6.2014, p. 45)

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Public Spending Code has also been considered in the formulation and design of the *Afforestation Scheme*.

2.2 The *Scheme* is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and operates throughout the State. The *Scheme* shall be operational from 06th September 2023 for a period to be determined by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

2.3 Participation in the *Scheme* is voluntary.

2.4 In accordance the Forestry Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 191 of 2017), all afforestation projects (whether availing of grant aid or not) must obtain prior written approval from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, hereafter referred to as a technical approval.

Note: a separate document sets out the legislative framework and other requirements for the Native Tree Area (NTA) Scheme.

2.5 Where payment of grant and premium is sought under the *Afforestation Scheme*, a separate financial approval of the project is also required from the Department. Afforestation projects undertaken without prior approval, both technical and financial, will not be eligible for grant assistance. Furthermore, persons who undertake afforestation without prior technical approval may be required to remove the trees planted and to restore the land to its condition prior to the commencement of the development within a specified timeframe, and/or be liable to prosecution.

3. State Aid requirements

3.1 The Incentive Effect

This applies only where the applicant is a small/medium enterprise SME. Small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined in the EU Recommendation 2003/361/EC) must confirm and declare on the FSAuth1 / FSAuth2 authorisation Forms that:

"*The work described herein, would not have been undertaken if it was not for the financial support provided under State Aid rules. Without this aid, there would be no change to current activities.*"

For large companies, documentary evidence must be submitted in relation to the counterfactual (what would happen without the aid) for each of the measures proposed. This involves a credibility check of the counterfactual to establish that the company would not carry out the proposed work in the absence of aid. A counterfactual is credible if it is genuine and relates to the decision-making factors prevalent at the time of the decision by the beneficiary regarding the activity.

Large companies must submit an internal company document (separate to the application form) showing that the company has analysed the viability of the project – with and without aid – and showing the incentive effect. The document must clearly state what would have happened without the support available under this Scheme.

That means that the documentation (internal report) produced by the company must establish that the aid will cause at least one of the following:

- a material increase in the size of the project /activity, or
- a material increase in the scope of the project / activity, or
- material increase in the total amount spent by the beneficiary on the project/activity or
- a material increase in the speed of completion of the project/activity concerned

DAFM will require that the company document shows a credible analysis and demonstration of the incentive effect. The document should contain an analysis which answers the following questions:

- Would the project proceed without State Aid assistance?
- Would the level of project expenditure be less without State Aid support? If so, indicate by how much?

This information should indicate changes in the project size, scope and total spend. Where required, this incentive effect document should be submitted with the relevant Form 1. As part of its evaluation of the application, the Forest Service will assess whether or not the incentive document meets the requirements set out above and is fully compliant with the European Union Guidelines for State Aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

3.2 Proportionality of the aid

Aid granted under this scheme must be proportionate. Support is considered proportional only if the same result could not be achieved with less aid, in other words if the amount of aid is limited to the minimum necessary. The aid amount should not exceed the minimum necessary to render the project sufficiently profitable, for example should not lead to increase its IRR beyond the normal rates of return applied by the undertaking concerned in other investment projects of a similar kind or, when available, to increase its IRR beyond the cost of capital of the undertaking as a whole or beyond the rates of return commonly observed in the sector concerned. For example the IRR should be comparable with returns experienced by entities which are not large companies. Where the IRR exceeds this reference figure then the application may be refused.

Large Companies must provide documentary evidence that the aid is proportionate. This can be achieved by submitting an IRR and NPV analysis of the investment with aid and without aid with the Form 1. Only applications which are deemed proportionate will be grant aided by the Forest Service.

3.3 Transparency

Ireland shall publish the following information on the State aid schemes: the full text of the notified aid scheme and its implementing provisions, the granting authority, the names of the individual beneficiaries, the form (in particular the aid instrument) and amount of aid granted to each beneficiary, the date of granting, the type of undertaking (SME/ large enterprise), the region (at Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics or NUTS level II) in which the beneficiary is located and the principal economic sector in which the beneficiary has its activities, at NACE group level. This requirement only applies to individual aid awards greater than:

(i) EUR 10,000 for beneficiaries active in the primary agricultural production;
(ii) EUR 100,000 for beneficiaries in the sectors of the processing of agricultural products, the marketing of agricultural products, the forestry sector or activities falling outside the scope of Article 42 of the Treaty.

4. Objectives of the Scheme

4.1 The primary Afforestation Scheme objective, consistent with Forest Strategy goals in relation to Forest for Climate, Nature, Wood, People, and Forest for the Economy and Rural Development is to increase the area of Ireland's forest estate by making progress towards the achievement of the following:

i. increase Ireland's forest cover to 18%;
ii. establishment of 8,000 ha of new diverse, multifunctional and climate resilient forests per annum (subject to the availability of funding and land);
iii. provide at least 50% of the national area afforested with broadleaved species and a require minimum per-application broadleaved species component (20% by area) during the programme period;

iv. encourage forest management practices in newly planted forests that result in continuous cover forest (CCF) management and forest retention, enhancing and supporting natural systems by linking existing habitats and new, dedicated forest biodiversity areas within established forests;
v. expand and encourage appropriate management of new emergent native scrub forest with attendant biodiversity, habitat and ecosystem service enhancements;
vi. increase the area of new forest area used by members of the public for forest recreation, amenity, health and wellbeing by providing dedicated “open forests” and specific forest recreational and amenity facilities;
vii. increase the uptake of agroforestry systems for biodiversity, carbon sequestration, animal welfare and the production of high quality hardwood timber;
viii. develop forest-based biomass resources to support the circular and green economy in commercial and domestic markets;
ix. support carbon sequestration, climate change mitigation and forest resilience through appropriate species selection and sustainable forest management;
x. provide a forest resource to support economic viability and sustainability of rural communities through increased use of wood and wood products in construction and energy production.

5. Eligibility

5.1 Individuals applying for participation in the scheme must be over 18 years of age and hold a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN). Companies must provide their company registration details (CRO number).

5.2 Applicants seeking technical approval under the *Scheme* must be the owner, leaseholder or joint manager of the land at the time of the application. Exceptions to this rule will only apply where: (i) the owner is deceased and his/her legal representative submits the application; or (ii) the owner consents in writing to the submission of the application in the name of a designated third party.

5.3 In order to qualify for payment of afforestation grants and premiums, the applicant must own, lease or be in joint management of the lands proposed for planting. Applicants must provide documentary evidence of ownership and of leasing or joint management where relevant, as detailed in the *Forestry Standards Manual*. This documentary evidence is typically required at submission of the claim for the 1st Grant Instalment but may also be sought at after a pre-approval application has been submitted.

5.4 The Department will refuse applications for grant aid where it is found that an application was made by a person other than a person that meets the above criteria.

5.5 Every effort should be made by registered foresters to ensure that multiple, spatially coincident afforestation applications are not submitted for the same applicant. If more than one application is submitted for the same area of land within any 12 month period, the Department reserves the right to consider only one of those applications following contact and agreement with the applicant.

5.6 Forests established and maintained in accordance with the *Scheme* will be eligible for payment of both an afforestation grant towards the cost of establishment, and an annual premium.

6. Grant and Premiums

6.1 A fixed afforestation grant towards the costs, subject to the maximum laid down in **Annex 1**, will be available to private and public land-holders, companies or municipalities for projects which comply with the requirements, terms and conditions of the *Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme*. Grants and premiums will be available only for projects which, prior to planting, have been granted a pre - technical approval (see section 10.4 below) by the Department, following the online submission of a pre-approval application using DAFM's iNET application system. Aid for afforestation under these measures will be granted solely in connection with duly justified and substantiated costs; and no over-compensation will take place.

6.2 Grants will be paid in two instalments. The first instalment may be claimed immediately after planting. The second instalment can be claimed no sooner than 4 years after planting has been completed, as outlined in **Annex 1**. All payments of grants will be conditional on the forest being successfully established and maintained in compliance with the conditions of approval and standards as outlined in the *Forestry Standards Manual*. Any area planted outside of the approved area will not be eligible for grant aid.

6.3 Application for payment of the 1st Instalment Grant and 1st Premium may be made following planting, in accordance with the terms of the technical approval. The time limit for submission of claims for the 1st Instalment Grant will be 12 weeks after date of completion of planting. The 1st Instalment Grant claim must be made using DAFM's iFORIS iNET application system which has been designed for submitting afforestation pre-approval applications and claiming related grant payments for planted lands. Where a 1st Instalment Grant claim is received after the prescribed period, the applicant must submit a written explanation for its late submission and it will be at the discretion of the Department as to whether or not the application can be accepted.

6.4 Subsequent premiums (i.e. claims for 2nd and subsequent premiums) shall be claimed by applicants using DAFM's online services. Applicants will be enabled as registered users for the DAFM's online AgFood services as part of the afforestation application process (See Section 10).

6.5 Application for payment of the 2nd Instalment Grant shall be made using DAFMs iNET system. Applications for payment will be made available via iNET in the 3 months before the 4th anniversary of the completion date of the forest. The 5th and subsequent premiums can be claimed when due each year following payment of the 2nd Instalment Grant. At the discretion of the Department, where the 2nd Instalment Grant has not been applied for, the 5th and 6th premiums may be paid. However, the 7th and subsequent premiums will not be paid until the 2nd Instalment Grant application has been submitted and the grant has been paid.

6.6 Forestry premiums will be payable only for new forests which qualify for an afforestation grant from the Department. Premiums will be payable for a maximum period of **20** years. In the case of FT8 – Agroforestry, premiums will be payable for a maximum period of 10 years.

6.7 For the purposes of eligibility and payment of premiums Applicants who qualify for farmer rate premium will be entitled to the maximum period of up to 20 years. Non farmers are eligible for 15 years of premiums.

6.8 Applicants that can pass the Departments Active Farmer check and that are an approved member of Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) scheme in the application year and a member of either BISS or Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) in the previous 4 years will be considered a farmer for this scheme. All other applicants will be deemed to be non-farmers for the purposes of this scheme.

'Active Farmer' means the applicant claiming payments on the land must be the applicant farming and/or managing the land, that is, the Active Farmer. The farming activities can include meeting a minimum stocking rate (0.10 livestock unit per forage hectare), producing crops, cutting hay/silage, maintaining landscape features. See BISS terms and conditions for further information.

New and young farmers who do not meet the criteria to be in BISS or BPS the previous four years will only need to have a valid BISS or BPS from the year they were approved members of either the Young Farmer schemes or the National Reserve for new and young farmer schemes until the year of their afforestation application. This will continue for the lifetime of the Afforestation Scheme 2023 – 2027.

An applicant self-declares as a farmer when lodging an afforestation application. Their status as a farmer will be verified at payment (Form 2) stage.

6.9 **Annex 1** details the grant and premium rates payable to entrants to the *Scheme*. The Minister reserves the right to alter these rates at any time. Beneficiaries of grant aid under this Scheme are required to retain all receipts and invoices relating to work undertaken to establish and maintain the forest for a period of 6 years following payment of the 1st instalment grant. The Minister may, at his or her discretion, require the submission to the Department of such receipts and/or invoices at any time during this period.

7. Conditions of Aid

7.1 Where an applicant makes an application for aid that is deemed valid and is approved by the Department, a contract then exists under the *Scheme* between the applicant and the Minister. The terms and conditions of this *Scheme* as set out in this document (which may be revised from time to time by the Minister), any circulars amending the scheme requirements, all applications, maps and submitted documents, including letters of approval and, where appropriate, remedial works notifications, form the terms and conditions of this contract. The contract will be identified by the contract number (**CN**) assigned to it by the Department when the application for approval is received via DAFM's iNET system.

7.2 Payments will be based on either the area claimed as eligible for payment by the applicant (on 1st Grant Claim, 2nd Grant Claim or Subsequent Grant Claim and associated maps) **or** the area determined by the Department to be eligible for payment, whichever is the lesser.

i. The Department's computerised mapping and payment system (iFORIS) is used by the Department to capture a digital representation of the payment area based on the applicant's claim map. Capturing the claim map in a digital form allows for the accurate measurement and calculation of the payment area. The process of electronically capturing the claim map is referred to as ***digitisation***. The **digitised area** of a contract (i.e. the entire forest) is the sum of the areas of the individual forest plots (including biodiversity) comprising that contract number or forest. For each plot contained in an

application for payment, the **digitised area** is the entire area of the forest plot within the perimeter boundary of that plot measured by the Department's iFORIS system.

ii. The **determined area** of a contract number or forest is the sum of the areas, determined by the Department to be eligible for payment, of the individual forest plots comprising that contract number or forest. The determined area is calculated by excluding any ineligible areas (e.g. power line corridors, rock, gas lines, or ineligible areas of biodiversity greater than 15%).

iii. The **claimed area** is the total area of the forest plots specified by the applicant in the application as being claimed for payment of an afforestation grant or premium payment. The claimed area is calculated by the applicant by deducting any part of the plot that is not eligible to receive afforestation grant and premium payments (e.g. power line corridors, rock, gas lines and ineligible biodiversity areas greater than 15%) from the digitised area.

iv. Whichever is the lesser of the **claimed area** or the **determined area** is deemed to be the area eligible for payment, known as the **payable area**. This is the area on which payments of afforestation grants and premiums will be based, subject to compliance with the requirements of the scheme as regards submission of proof of ownership.

7.3. Where an area delineated as the payable area on a claim map submitted by the applicant differs from the area specified on the species plot table attached to a map or the area specified as part of the 1st Instalment Grant Claim, 2nd Instalment Grant Claim or Subsequent Grant Claim, the lesser of these areas will be deemed to be the area claimed by the applicant.

7.4. Where the determined area (i.e. the area determined by the Department) is greater than the claimed area (i.e. the area claimed by the applicant), this is deemed to be an under-claim. In such cases, a new revised claimed area equal to the determined area can be submitted by the applicant in respect of the following and all subsequent payments due under the contract. The onus is on the applicant to satisfy themself that the revised claim that they submitted is correct. This revised claimed area will then be deemed to be the payable area for the remainder of the grant and premium payments due under the contract. This change cannot be applied retrospectively and no back money will be paid in respect of payments that were made or, in the case of annual premiums, were due to be paid before the revised claim is submitted. (If not already due for payment or paid by the time the revised claim is submitted, the 2nd Instalment Grant will be calculated and paid on the basis of the revised claim but no back money will be paid in respect of the 1st Instalment Grant already paid.)

7.5. A 1st Instalment Grant will not be paid until ownership has been established and full proof of ownership has been provided to the Department within the time limit specified in Section 10.

7.6. Where correspondence (i.e. a remedial works letter) is issued to the applicant specifying remedial works required to bring their forest up to standard, the date specified in that letter by which the works must be completed is binding on the applicant. In exceptional circumstances, the Minister may grant an extension to that date. Requests for such extensions must be submitted in writing by the applicant and registered forester at least 30 days before the expiry of the original deadline for completion. Failure to complete the specified works to the satisfaction of the Forest Service will result in a penalty, as set out in the document titled Forestry Schemes Penalty Schedules.

7.7. Grants and/or premiums will be paid only when the entire forest is up to the required standard. Where part of the forest fails inspection, payment will be withheld on the entire area until remedial works are carried out and the forest is established to the required standard.

7.8. Where, following review, the Forest Service decides that it is not possible to bring the forest, or part thereof, up to the required standard, no further payment will be made for that area. Where

the grant and/or premium, or part thereof, is not to be paid, the Forest Service may also require repayment of the amount paid in respect of the forest or in respect of the area that does not meet the required standard.

7.9. Payments shall be made in respect of applicants who make valid applications prepared by a registered forester and who have established their forest in accordance with the conditions of the technical approval and financial and in compliance with:

i. All relevant EU requirements and national legislation for the time being in force including, but not limited to.

ii. The terms and conditions of this Scheme as set out in this document (and any subsequent revisions thereof), any circulars amending the Scheme requirements, application forms, letters of approval and, where appropriate, remedial works notifications.

iii. Forestry Standards Manual; Land Types for Afforestation; Environmental Requirements for Afforestation.

8. Land for Afforestation

8.1 The term “afforestation” means the planting of land deemed not previously under forest. The *Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme 2023–2027* is applicable to agricultural land. However, what are considered non-agricultural lands or suitable brownfield sites where there are no significant adverse silvicultural or environmental considerations may be considered on application. See Land Types for Afforestation and Environmental Requirement for Afforestation documents for eligibility criteria.

Unsuitable afforestation lands includes a range of sites that are deemed to be unsuitable for afforestation under the Afforestation Scheme, due to infertile conditions (as indicated by vegetation) and / or other inhibiting site or environmental factors (e.g. Annex 1 Habitats on wet and dry heath and blanket and raised bog).

8.2 Please see Land Types for Afforestation for land excluded from the *Afforestation Scheme*:

9. Duration of a contract under the scheme

9.1 The duration or expiry of an afforestation contract in its entirety, or for certain Forest Type(s) (FTs) within a contract with more than one FT, is set out below:

9.2 An afforestation contract may contain any FT and/or a combination of more than one FT, except where the contract consists of a single FT of FT3 – Forest Creation on Public Lands. Such contracts planted under Forest Creation on Public Lands FT are paid 1st and 2nd Instalment Grants and are eligible for 15 years annual premiums. The duration or expiry on all Afforestation contracts is limited by either the payment of 20 premiums for farmers and 15 premiums for non-farmers or the end of the 22nd year for farmers or the end of the 17th year (calendar year) for non-farmers from the date of completion of the forest that was specified with the information submitted in support of the claim for the 1st Instalment Grant, whichever of these limits come first.

9.3 Where circumstances exist that may require an extension of the contract term (for example, outstanding remedial works), the expiry date of a contract may be extended at the discretion of the Minister.

9.4 Any payments not applied for in accordance with the Scheme and/or not approved for payment by the expiry of the contract may be forfeited at the discretion of the Minister. The Minister reserves the right to forfeit any payments on the basis of non-compliance with the requirements of the scheme.

10. Application Procedure

The DAFM/Forestry Division charged with administering the *Afforestation Scheme* are based in Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford. Email contact information for the DAFM/Forestry Division sections processing afforestation pre-approval application and related grant applications are listed below. The section can also be contacted by phone at 053 916 3400.

Email Addresses	**Queries**
forestryappenq@agriculture.gov.ie	Pre-Approvals, application procedures
forestry.1stgrant@agriculture.gov.ie	1st Grant and 1st premium
forestry.premiums@agriculture.gov.ie	Subsequent premiums
forestry.2ndgrant@agriculture.gov.ie	2nd Grant
felling.forestservice@agriculture.gov.ie	Felling licences

10.1 Paying of Fees for Afforestation Licence Applications

The Forestry (Amendment) Regulations, 2020 (SI No. 417 of 2020) – which introduced fees for forestry licence applications and submissions made by members of the public, on those applications from 07/10/2020. Fees are €20 per licence application and €20 per submission (by any one application reference number).

The Department has made available various methods by which these fees may be paid, including providing Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) facilities - see below. Forestry companies acting on behalf of forester owners opt to consider multiple applications and pay in bulk in advance for those applications. During the registration of an application for an afforestation licence, there are certain documents (mandatory documents) that must be received before the application may be considered complete. The payment of the appropriate fee will be considered a “mandatory document” in respect of afforestation and the application will not be accepted and advertised until the fee is received.

To pay for an Afforestation Application Fee to DAFM by EFT (see circular 15/2022):

1. All payments must be in Euro to the bank account detailed below.
2. If payment is being made from outside Ireland, your transfer must include payment for any fees that your bank or intermediaries may charge. DAFM must receive the full invoiced amount.
3. Each EFT payment made must quote your name or your DAFM nine-digit customer number (e.g. 100987456 or 300987456) in the reference field. This enables the Department to distinguish your payment in our account.
4. Each payment must be followed by remittance notice detailing:

    a. Name and address details.
    b. Your nine-digit customer number (eg. 100987456 or 300987456)
    c. The date and amount paid into the Department’s EFT Account.
    d. A listing of the specific Department invoice number(s) to which the payment refers. (eg. 9110000123) or

e. Where no invoice has issued a detailed description of purpose of the payment. The details at d) and e) are required to enable the Department clear the payment against the correct invoice(s) or the correct service(s).
5. Where a payment is to cover a number of different branches of your company (i.e., a number of DAFM customers) a breakdown of the payment is required giving the details at 4 for each branch.

The remittance notice can be sent:

By email to: eftpayments@agriculture.gov.ie

By post to: EFT Payments, Cash Office, Accounts Division, Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, Government Buildings, Farnham Street, Cavan, H12 D459.

Note: The Department cannot accept any responsibility for payments made into this account that cannot be identified due to lack of information.

1. All payments must be in Euro to the bank account detailed below.
2. If payment is being made from outside Ireland, your transfer must include payment for any fees that

Bank account for EFT payments to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Bank Details: Danske Bank, International House, 3 Harbourmaster Place, IFSC, Dublin 1
Account Name: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine – Receipts – Public Bank Account
IBAN: IE23DABA95159950006254
BIC: DABAIE2D
Account No.: 50006254
Sort Code: 95-15-99

10.2 Pre-Application Discussion (PAD)

The PAD is optional and available for all Registered Foresters. The basis of the PAD is to provide some pre-application high-level information to the Registered Forester on behalf of the landowner. The key aims of the PAD are to improve the quality of applications and to speed up the application process. The process is without prejudice to any changes that may be made by registered forester/landowner to any formal afforestation application submitted to DAFM. The Department's feedback is also without prejudice as the Department will examine the formal application in a more comprehensive manner once received. The PAD can be facilitated by the Department with on-line engagement/virtual meetings being the norm and where necessary field visits may be accommodated.

10.3 Placement of Site Notices in respect of Afforestation Licence Applications

Statutory Instrument No. 191 of 2017 requires that site notices must be in place to adequately inform the public when making an application for a licence to undertake afforestation. Where an application consists of multiple non-contiguous plots that cannot be clearly seen from the location of the Site Notice there must be more than one Site Notice displayed at the entrance or boundary adjoining each public road. These notices must be easily visible and legible by persons using the public road, and shall not be obscured or concealed at any time. It is not sufficient to place one Site Notice per

application where there are multiple non-contiguous plots spreading over a wide area or where the site adjoins more than one public road.

All details included in the afforestation application must be fully consistent with the information presented on the Site Notice erected, (e.g. all townlands overlapping with the proposal must be listed and spelt correctly). The Site Notice must be clearly legible, affixed on rigid, durable material and secured against damage from bad weather and other causes and adequately inform the public (Circular 15/2017 refers). It is important that Site notices are erected before making the application and are then maintained in position on the land concerned for a period of not less than 5 weeks from the date of publication by the Minister on the DAFM website and the Forestry Licence Viewer (FLV) of the notice of application. If the Site Notice is removed or becomes defaced or illegible during this period it must be replaced immediately, as failure to do so may invalidate the application. See Circular 23/2023 and Circular 12/2024 for details of the Site Notices to be used on all occasions.

The appropriate maps and associated supporting afforestation application documentation must be submitted to the Forest Service within the timeframes indicated below for each stage of the application process.

10.4 Application for Technical Approval

An application for technical approval to plant under the Afforestation Scheme must be made using DAFM's online **iFORIS iNET** system. The applicant and a Registered Forester must complete relevant forms and this information must be the submitted online along with application declarations, relevant maps and other supporting information as applicable further to a site visit and detailed field assessment carried out by the Registered Forester.

Technical approval is only valid up to and including the expiry date specified in the letter of approval.

Note: A technical approval confirms only that the proposed forest detailed in the application complies with the silvicultural and environmental requirements of the *Scheme* and the approval provides permission to plant all or part of the area specified, as long as the planting and all the works undertaken do not lead to a material change in the project for which the technical approval was granted and the areas planted meet scheme requirements.

A technical approval **does not** confirm eligibility for a grant under the *Scheme*, nor does it confirm that funding for a grant has been approved. A separate financial approval is required for this purpose. The issuing of a technical approval **does not guarantee** that a forest proposed or amended by conditions applied by the Department will establish successfully.

Responsibility for the successful establishment of a forest rests solely with the applicant and the Department will not accept any liability if the forest fails to establish. Nor can the registered forester and applicant rely upon inspection by the Department to ensure that the standards required of him or her are achieved. Failure to establish a forest to the required standard may give rise to recovery by the Department of all grants and premiums paid to the applicant. The Department accepts no liability for costs incurred by an applicant at this stage or at all.

10.5 Form 1a – Application for Financial Approval to Plant

Applicants with technical approval may apply for financial approval by completing and submitting a **Form 1a** available from the DAFM website. Generally speaking, a **Form 1a** should be submitted only when planting is imminent and arrangements have been put in place to commence planting.

Financial approval will be granted if funding is available to the Department for the project. Financial approval confirms that funding for the project is available and has been provisionally reserved for the project that is the subject of the application.

10.6 Form 1b - Notice of Substantial Commencement

A **Form 1b** (notice of substantial commencement) must be submitted to the Department after the issuing of financial approval and must contain the date of substantial commencement of planting. Where, for any reason during the life of the 2023-2027 Forestry Programme, the Department requires submission of the **Form 1b** within a specific period, this requirement will be notified by circular.

Failure to submit a **Form 1b** within that period will result in funding for the project being withdrawn. The applicant will also be precluded from reapplying for financial approval for a specified period from the date of the award of the previously granted financial approval.

10.7 Form 1c –Notice of Completion

A **Form 1c** must be submitted immediately following forest formation and not later than the expiry date specified in the technical approval.

10.8 Form 2 - Application for 1st Instalment Grant and 1st Premium

An application for payment of the 1st Instalment Grant and 1st Premium must be made using 'using DAFM's online **iFORIS iNET** system. A claim for the 1st Instalment grant will not be processed separately from the claim for the 1st premium except, as provided below, where a valid premium claim has not been submitted. The time limit for receipt of the 1st Instalment Grant claim in the Department shall be 12 weeks after the date of completion of the forest. Where a 1st Grant Claim is received after the prescribed period, the applicant must submit a written explanation for its late submission and it will be at the discretion of the Department as to whether or not the application can be accepted. The applicant and their Registered Forester must make the appropriate declaration(s) and submit the 1st Grant Claim using the online **iFORIS iNET** system following a site visit and a detailed field and forest plot assessment by the registered forester. Where supporting documentation (e.g. ownership proof) could relate to more than one contract, individual copies of the documentation must be submitted with each 1st Instalment Grant claim.

Where a 1st Instalment Grant claim is submitted to Department using **iFORIS iNET** within the required 12 weeks time-frame but supporting documentation remains to be submitted, the application will be held open for a maximum of 2 calendar years from the data of completion of the forest. Unless all supporting documentation needed to make a valid application for 1st grant and 1st premium is received in the Department within the 2-year limit, the annual premiums that would have been due for payment in respect of the intervening calendar years will be forfeited. As regards the 1st grant, payment may be made on receipt of supporting documentation up to 6 years after the date of completion. However, no arrears of premium for the intervening years will be paid. After year 6 the grant will also be forfeited and the contract considered terminated if a fully valid claim with all necessary documentation has not been lodged in the Department. Non-payment of a forester or forestry company for works carried out will be a matter for resolution between the owner and the forester or forestry company and the Minister shall bear no liability.

10.9 Form 3 - Application for 2nd Instalment Grant

An application for payment the 2nd Instalment Grant may be claimed for payment 4 years after the completion date of the forest and must be made using 'using DAFM's online **iFORIS iNET** system. The applicant and his/her Registered Forester must make the appropriate declarations and submit the 2nd Grant Claim using the online **iFORIS iNET** system following a site visit and a detailed field and forest plot assessment by the registered forester. Payment of the 2nd instalment grant will also be determined by the conditions at Section 6.

10.10 Form 4 - Application for Subsequent Premium

An application for payment of the 2nd and subsequent premiums must be made using 'using DAFM's online services. Where an applicant has registered to use these services, applications for forest premiums must be made at www.agfood.ie.

Applicants wishing to register for Department's on-line services can do so at www.agfood.ie.

Subject to the terms and conditions of the scheme being met, the premiums payable under the scheme will be paid on the basis of one each calendar year starting in the year that the forest was completed.

Subject to and limited by the duration of the contract as defined above, each annual premium is normally applied for in the year in which it is due for payment. Where such application is not made within the year, all conditions for eligibility for the premium must be fulfilled and the valid application must be received in the Department within 2 years of the 1st January of the year in which that particular premium falls due for payment, otherwise the premium payment for that year will be forfeited. For example, a premium due in 2023 must, at the latest, be applied for and paid by 31st December 2024. If premiums have been forfeited or not claimed for 6 consecutive years or more, the contract will be deemed to have been terminated and no further payments will issue under that contract. Payments already made under the contract may be recovered if the forest has not been maintained to Forest Service standards.

11. Environmental Considerations

11.1 All applications for afforestation approval under the *Afforestation Scheme 2023-2027* will undergo an environment assessment procedure to ensure that proposed projects are compatible with the protection and enhancement of the environment, including, inter alia, water, biodiversity, archaeology and landscape. The cost of supplying any additional information, for example EIS, NIS, ecological or archaeological report(s)) that is required by the Forest Service in order to enable it to further assess the application must be borne by the Applicant, as the proponent of the proposed afforestation.

11.2 The Environment report and associated grant (ERG) is available to offset cost involved. See Annex 1. Table 3 for details.

11.3 All afforestation projects can now avail of the ERG to help offset additional regulatory requirements in the application process.

12. Environmental Impact Assessment

12.1 Where an afforestation project involves an area of 50 hectares or greater, the application for approval must be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to enable the Department to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

12.2 All afforestation projects of less than 50 hectares will be subject to an environmental impact assessment screening process undertaken by the Department at pre-approval stage to determine if the project is likely to have a significant effect on the environment either alone or in combination with other afforestation, forest-related and non-forest related projects. If the Department determines that a project is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, the applicant will be required to submit an EIS to enable the Department to undertake an EIA.

13. Appropriate Assessment

13.1 Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive sets out the requirement for Appropriate Assessment in relation to SACs and SPAs (or 'Natura sites'). This Directive states that the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned. This requirement is transposed into Irish law mainly through S.I.477 / 2011 (Section 5). Any application for a Forestry Regulation S.I.191 / 2017 licence (including for afforestation) and / or forestry grant support is regarded as a 'project'. The area where the proposed activity (and ancillary operations) is to take place, is the 'project area'. The Department is the 'competent national authority' and it must be sure that the project meets the exacting requirements set out under Article 6(3). The process comprises two steps: AA screening, and (if necessary) Appropriate Assessment. They are often referred to as 'Stage 1' and 'Stage 2', respectively.

13.2 As required under the Birds and Habitats Regulations (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), all applications submitted to the Department under the Scheme will be subject to an appropriate assessment screening process undertaken by the Department to determine if there is a possibility of the project, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, having a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site.

13.3 As set out under S.I.477 of 2011, as amended, and S.I.191 of 2017, as amended, where a site has been ‘screened in’ for appropriate assessment, the Minister can seek the submission of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) to inform that process. Applicants can also opt to submit a NIS with the submission of afforestation application in the assumption that the project will be screened in.

13.4 The Department has provided guidance Applicants and his/her Registered Forester and other agents, on the preparation of a NIS, and sets out a template to be adhered to (see Circular 14/2020).

14. Appropriate Assessment Pre-Screening Report and Other Information

14.1 The primary purpose of the AA Pre-Screening Report is to enable the Applicant and his / her Registered Forester or Agent to inform themselves whether there is a likelihood of a (afforestation) project having a significant effect, individually, on a European site (i.e. a SAC of SPA), which will affect whether the project is approved, and the nature of any approval issued. This will enable the Applicant to address related issues prior to submission of an application for afforestation to the Department.

14.2 Where it is deemed that no likelihood exists, the report can then be submitted to the Department with the application, presenting that position and detailing the supporting evidence / rationale. (Where a likelihood exists, the Applicant can opt to submit a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) alongside the application and the Pre-Screening Report, setting out proposed mitigation to ensure no adverse effect.) The submitted Pre-Screening Report will be considered by the District Inspector when carrying out their AA Screening of the project.

14.3 Afforestation represents a land use change, and from an ecological perspective the existing onsite habitats and their possible use by protected species, require particular attention. Therefore, a Pre-Screening Report and associated Habitat & Receiving Environment Map should be generated, (See also Circular 13 of 2020), along with an Ecological Report if there is any non-AA ecology related issue. The Pre-screening Report must include a description and assessment of the habitats present on site including any links present (or absent) to Annex I habitats. In some cases, it may be possible to address other non-AA ecology related issues in the description and results of an Ecological Survey and associated maps in the Appendix of the Pre-screening report.

14.4 The Department may also, at its discretion, require other forms of technical investigation and reports to be submitted to facilitate its assessment of an afforestation project. These may include, among other things, an ecological assessment and report by a suitably qualified Ecologist. The involvement of an Ecologist during the summer months is particularly timely, as these months overlap with the field season for botanical surveys. Other seasonal/timing constraints (e.g. for bird surveys) may also apply.

15. Consultations and Public Notification Procedure

15.1 When the Department receives an application under the Scheme, a public notice of the application will be placed on the Departments website detailing (i) the contract number of the application; (ii) the location of the proposed afforestation site (Townland and County); and (iii) size of the proposed afforestation project.

15.2 Applications which require the submission of an EIS to enable the Department to undertake an EIA may also have notices of the application, the EIS, and any significant additional information submitted, placed in one or more local/ national newspapers.

15.3 **Forestry Licence Viewer (FLV)**

To support the forestry licensing system and to aid consultation and public notification of forestry licence developments, the Department has made available on its website, an online portal. This portal or "Forestry Licence Viewer", details licence application information and supporting documents, which provide information on licence applications including afforestation licences. The Forestry (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2020, allows the Department to publish personal information on documents supporting a forestry licence application as an aid to consultation and public notification. The current consultation procedures for forestry licencing applications include a minimum 30-day consultation period on receipt of an afforestation licence application.

A list of documents made available in the FLV is included below, although this is not exhaustive:

a. Paper application
b. Pre-technical approval submission report
c. Map information
d. Fencing map
e. Biodiversity/operational map
f. Habitats map and report
g. AA – Pre-screening report
h. Natura Impact Statement (NIS)
i. Pre-scribed body letters – NPWS, local authorities, An Taisce, Inland Fisheries
j. Responses from referral bodies
k. Submissions (from the public or other third parties)
l. Submission acknowledgements
m. Requests for further information (FIR)
n. Information submitted following FIR
o. AA determination
p. In-combination Report
q. Decision letters – Technical Approval Letter
r. Notification of decision and right of appeal to submitters
s. Withdrawal/suspension letters (appeal)

16. Consultation for Afforestation Licences that require Appropriate Assessment

16.1 Further to the changes in the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Amendment) Regulations, 2021, (S.I. No. 293 of 2021) a second 30-day consultation period is required after receipt of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) or after an Appropriate Assessment Report is produced by the Department, and relevant documentation will be published on the FLV. If a NIS is submitted with the initial application only one public consultation period is required. This public second 30-day consultation period process applies to files which are screened-in for Appropriate Assessment only.

16.2 Lists of Appropriate Assessment afforestation applications open for consultation are published on the Forestry Public Consultation pages of the Department's website. A submission on these applications will be accepted on payment of the fee of €20 per submission, although no fee shall apply where a person has already made and paid for a submission on the same file.

17. Paying of Fees for Submissions related to Afforestation Licence Applications

17.1 Any person may make a submission or observation concerning afforestation applications, including on the likely effect on the environment of a proposed project, within 30 days of the publication of the notice on the Department's website or following a second consultation where an Afforestation Licence that requires Appropriate Assessment. Submissions or requests for further information, must be made in writing and any submission must include a name or names, postal address and phone number or email.

17.2 Submissions can be made via the FLV when viewing the afforestation licence details in the FLV. Submissions received on forestry licence applications are made available to view in the Forestry Licence Viewer (FLV) The name and address of the person(s) that makes the submission will be available in the FLV.

17.3 The Forestry (Amendment) Regulations (S.I. No. 417 of 2020) provide for the charging of application and submission fees. The fee for the making of a submission in respect of any one application (by licence reference number) is €20. A single submission that covers several licence reference numbers will be charged according to each reference number. Submission fees are non-refundable regardless of the final decision on the licence application including withdrawal, or if the submission and/or payment are received after the closing date for submissions.

17.4 Submissions must be received by 4pm on the date indicated on the notice. Submissions received by post delivered to the address below on the closing date or submissions received by email if the timestamp of the email is sent before 4pm on the closing date, will be considered valid providing payment is also received before the closing date. It is important that submissions are emailed to the correct address, as indicated below. Submissions sent to other email addresses cannot be accepted as valid.

17.5 A fee is also payable in relation to the provision of information regarding forestry licences and/or copies of those licences and related documents.

The fees are:

(i) for the search and retrieval of a record, a fee of €20 per hour for the time spent, by each person concerned, in carrying out the search and retrieval efficiently,

(ii) for the copying of the requested record, a fee of €0.04 for each sheet that forms part of the record,

(iii) fees under (i) and (ii) apply regardless whether requests for records are made in hard copy or electronic format.

17.6 Enquiries and submissions on applications for licences for Afforestation should be addressed to:

By Post: Approvals Section, Forestry Division, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford.

By Email: forestrysubmission@agriculture.gov.ie

17.7 Valid cheques, bank drafts, postal orders or money orders may be sent by post with a written submission. Do not send bank notes in the post. Such payments must be made payable to Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. A submission accompanied with payment by cheque, bank draft, postal or money orders, that is found to be invalid, will not be accepted. Third party cheques, bank drafts, postal or money orders cannot be accepted.

17.8 Payment is accepted by credit/debit card over the phone between 09.15am – 12.45pm and 2pm – 5pm Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays). Please phone 053-9163425, where card details will be taken, and payment processed. During this call, you will be asked for your name, address and phone number and the reference number of the application concerned. This is to enable matching the payment to the submission. The information will not be retained, once the payment is validated and attached to a submission. The Department cannot accept responsibility for incorrect licence reference numbers.

17.9 All valid submissions will be acknowledged by the Department, which will serve as a receipt of payment of the submission fee.

17.10 The Department may also consult with relevant consultation bodies including:

National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Monuments Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, Inland Fisheries Ireland, the relevant local authority and An Taisce. Other bodies may also be consulted with, as required.

17.11 Detailed information on the environmental protection and controls consultation process that apply to this Scheme are set out in the *Forestry Standards Manual* and relevant Forest Service circulars. These document detail the environmental standards governing forestry and the associated consultative processes undertaken by the Department when determining whether or not a proposed afforestation project is compatible with the objectives of the scheme and the protection and enhancement of the environment.

18. Technical Approval

A technical approval issued under the *Scheme* may be subject to additional conditions as laid down by the Minister. These may be of a silvicultural or environmental nature, or may relate to other requirements. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all works are undertaken in compliance with the requirements of the *Scheme*. Technical approval does not guarantee eligibility for entry into or funding under the *Afforestation Scheme*. The Department accepts no responsibility or liability for costs incurred by an applicant on foot of technical approval or at all.

19. Material Change

NOTE: It is the responsibility of the applicant to inform the Forest Service in writing of any proposed **material change**, for example; an increased area to be planted compared to the approval area issued) and to seek approval for any such change before applying for financial approval or before planting commences. Failure to obtain approval from the Department for proposed changes may render the technical approval null and void.

20. Silvicultural and Environmental Standards

An applicant must comply with all forest rules and silvicultural related scheme requirements and environmental requirements as detailed in the *Forestry Standards Manual* and the *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation*.

21. Interactions and Eligibility - Afforestation and Irelands CAP Strategic Plan (CSP)

21.1 Interactions and Eligibility - Afforestation and Irelands CAP Strategic Plan (CSP)

Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 underpins the sustainable development of Ireland's agriculture sector by:

i. supporting viable farm incomes and enhancing competitiveness;

ii. contributing to the achievement of environmental and climate objectives at national and EU levels, and;

iii. strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas.

Tree planting actions have been included in both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP). The Eco-Scheme (Pillar 1) includes a tree planting option as part of the menu of options that farmers

can choose from. The Pillar II Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) includes a number of tree planting actions for specific objectives.

21.2 Eligibility for Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS)

Lands afforested under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme and Native Tree Area Scheme are considered an eligible hectare.

If you are in receipt of aid under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme (including the FEPS, the Native Woodland Establishment Scheme, the Agroforestry or the Forestry for Fibre Scheme) or the Native Tree Area Scheme you are obliged to declare all the land parcels on your holding on your 2024 BISS application.

All land parcels in receipt of payment under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme (including the FEPS, the Native Woodland Establishment Scheme the Agroforestry or the Forestry for Fibre Scheme) or the Native Tree Area Scheme are registered on the Department's Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) with a unique identification number. Failure to declare afforested parcels under these schemes on LPIS could affect future forestry grant/premium payments.

Following changes to the EU Regulations land which was afforested since 2009 and land which will be afforested under the Afforestation Scheme will be eligible to draw down a BISS payment provided that the afforested land meets the following requirements:

i). The area must have given a right to payment under the Basic Payment Scheme (2015 to 2022)

ii). Farmers who wish to benefit from the BISS Payment on afforested land, must be the person or persons named as forestry scheme beneficiary, or joint beneficiary. This means that you must be the person or persons eligible for payment of the forestry premium in the relevant year. Please note this also applies to members of the same family.

iii). The afforested land meets all the requirements of the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme (including the FEPS, the Native Woodland Establishment Scheme the Agroforestry or the Forestry for Fibre Scheme).

iv). Eligible Forestry parcels that are declared on BISS applications to activate entitlements will also be subject to conditionality requirements.

Farmers who plant land parcels under an Afforestation measure before submitting their annual BISS application should declare the land as Forestry including the reference to the BISS application year. Lands afforested in the spring of 2024 are declared as Forestry 2024.

Once the period of premia payments under the Afforestation Scheme has concluded, these parcels will remain eligible for BISS once you maintain your mandatory commitment to that particular afforestation measure by complying with the provisions set out in the Forestry Act 2014.

Further details on BISS eligibility may be found on the Department's website.

21.3 Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) and Afforestation

Afforestation is fully compatible with ACRES and is recognised as contributing to the creation of a valuable landscape mosaic at farm-level. Applicants considering participating in ACRES are recommend to explore the opportunities afforded by the National Forestry Programme when planning for the scheme. ACRES terms and conditions allow for parcel interaction with the Afforestation scheme with financial penalty accruing to the landowner e.g.:

i. A parcel on which an ACRES action is situated may subsequently be split to facilitate afforestation.

ii. The Department may authorise an action undertaken as part of a participant's ACRES contract to be terminated or its area adjusted before its normal end date without penalty or full reimbursement of funding already paid out, during its period of operation, as follows:
- The beneficiary subscribes to a new commitment considered of equal or higher benefit to the environment and/or climate, and
- The existing commitment is completed for a minimum of two years, and
- The proposed new commitment is part of Ireland's EU-approved National Forestry Programme.

iv. Where land is afforested during the course of a contract year, payment will only be made for the dates the action, which is the subject of the termination, is in place.

v. The forest creation measures in ACRES are exempted from the requirement to obtain an afforestation licence under Section 22 of the Forestry Act 2014. This exemption is based on the provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare and Forestry (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022. Forests and trees planted under this Scheme are afforded protection by the Forestry Act 2014 (and any Act that succeeds or replaces that Act), which controls felling of trees.

vi. A felling licence may be required to fell or otherwise remove trees that have been planted as part of ACRES. Under the Forestry Act 2014, there are certain situations where the felling of a tree is exempted from the need to obtain a felling licence.

21.4 Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) and Afforestation

Afforestation is recognised as contributing to the creation of a valuable landscape mosaic at farm-level. Parcels which are included in an OFS contract can be converted to forestry during the OFS contract period without penalty. Parcels of land afforested under Agroforestry will also be entitled to enter the Organic Farming Scheme.

22. Conditionality and Land Use Reconciliation Requirements

22.1 As an accredited EU paying agency, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is obliged to carry out checks and controls on all applications.

Conditionality sets the baseline requirements for farmers in receipt of CAP payments and replaces the “cross compliance” requirements in the previous CAP. Conditionality consists of Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) standards as detailed in Annex III of EU Regulation 2021/2115 in respect of the following specific areas;

• the climate and the environment, including water, soil and biodiversity of ecosystems,

• public health and plant health, and

• animal welfare. The conditionality requirements are implemented in two ways:

1. Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) - these refer to the legislative requirements concerning the climate and the environment, public health and plant health, and animal welfare. These are laid down in legislation and are applicable to all farmers - not just those participating in CAP interventions.

2. Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) - these refer to a range of standards concerning soil, climate change mitigation, habitats, and water. There are nine GAECs in the agreed Regulation. These apply to all farmers receiving CAP support and have been tailored to Ireland based on farm size, farm structures and the specific characteristics of the areas concerned, including soil and climatic condition, existing farming systems and land use.

Further information in relation to Conditionality in general including the relevant SMRs and GAECs, is available from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine website at gov.ie - Conditionality (www.gov.ie)

22.2 Subject to Section 21.2 above regarding the BISS, beneficiaries of the *Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme* 2023-2027 must ensure that afforested land entered into the scheme is not included, or the subject of a claim, under any other area based scheme administered by the Department. The Minister may impose adjustments, reductions in payments and/or penalties or may recoup money already paid if an application under the scheme exceeds the area approved, and/or overlaps with an area which is the subject of a claim under another area-based scheme administered by the Department.

23. Good Practice and Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)

23.1 Adherence to good forestry practice and the principles of sustainable forest management (SFM) is mandatory and applies across all operations of the *Afforestation Scheme*. Operational guidance on how forestry operations should be carried out so as to ensure compliance with SFM is provided in the *Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland*, *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation and the Forestry Standards Manual*, which can be downloaded from the Department’s website at: gov.ie - Regulation, Forest Health and Resources (www.gov.ie)

24. Payment

24.1 As the contract under this Scheme is between the applicant and the Department, payment is made to the applicant. However, applicants may mandate grant payments (not premiums) to a registered forester or forestry company using a mandate document that satisfies the requirements of the Minister as set out in the *Forestry Standards Manual*. Such mandates are a voluntary arrangement between the applicant and his/her registered forester or company. Mandates to other parties e.g. Contractors or Foresters not registered with the Forest Service, will not be facilitated. In the event that a payment fails to be made in accordance with a valid mandate no liability shall be attached to the Minister.

24.2 If it is subsequently found that any undue payment or overpayment has occurred in respect of any grant, premium or other payment made under the scheme, the Applicant will be liable to repay the entire amount of the undue payment or overpayment to the Department, regardless of how the undue payment or overpayment arose.

24.3 The Department may offset the amount owed from any other monies due to the applicant by the Department. The Department may also recover the monies as a simple contract debt in a court of competent jurisdiction.

25. Penalties

25.1 Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the Scheme, incorporating The Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland; Forestry Standards Manual; Environmental Requirements for Afforestation; Land Types for Afforestation or conditions of an afforestation licence; circulars amending scheme requirements; and the relevant environmental guidelines and requirements may result in an appropriate penalty or sanction being applied.

25.2 Penalties which shall apply to certain specific breaches of the Scheme are set out in the document titled *Forestry Scheme Penalty Schedules* which are a condition of grant aid. Other breaches of the Scheme not specified in the Scheme Penalties Schedules may also incur a penalty. However, all or any failure to comply with the scheme or any breaches of its terms and conditions may result in a penalty.

25.3 Penalties may include the repayment of all or part of the grant(s) and/or all or part of the annual premium(s).

25.4 Monetary penalties shall include interest payable at the rate provided for under *S.I. No. 13 of 2006*. Interest shall be calculated for the period elapsing between a date specified in a notification to the applicant of the repayment obligation and either repayment or recovery by deduction.

25.5 Penalty amounts may be deducted from future payments due to the Applicant under the forestry schemes or from payments due under other schemes administered by the Department. Where monetary penalties are not paid or recovered within the period requested, the Department may take whatever action is deemed necessary for their recovery. The Department may also recover the monies as a simple contract debt in a court of competent jurisdiction.

25.6 The principle of proportionality will apply. Penalties may be imposed that are, in the opinion of the Minister, proportionate to the alleged breach of the Scheme.

25.7 The imposition of a penalty shall not relieve an Applicant of an obligation to comply with an instruction from the Minister to undertake remedial works in respect of a forest.

26. Appeals

The applicant, or a registered forester acting on behalf and with the written permission of the applicant, may appeal against any decision of the Department regarding (i) an application for a pre-approval (i.e. an Afforestation Licence Decision); (ii) a grant; (iii) a premium or (iv) a penalty.

26.1 Appeals of DAFM decisions in respect of Afforestation Licence Applications

26.1.1. The Agriculture Appeals Act, 2001, amended by the Forestry Act 2014, includes Section 14A, which provides for an appeals service against decisions on forestry applications made by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The legislation led to the establishment by the Minister, of the Forestry Appeals Committee (FAC) in 2018.

26.1.2. The FAC operates under a separate statutory basis to that of the Agriculture Appeals Office functions. However, the Agriculture Appeals Office provides the administrative and secretariat support to the FAC Appeals Officers may be appointed as members of the FAC. The Forestry Appeals Committee (FAC) provides an appeals service where, if a person is dissatisfied with a decision of the Minister or an officer of the Minister, they may submit an appeal against a decision on an afforestation licence.

26.1.3. Appeals in respect of afforestation Licence applications must be submitted by post on a notice of appeal form and the fee of €200 must accompany the notice of appeal. The postal address is Forestry Appeals Committee, Agriculture Appeals Office, Kilminchy Court, Portlaoise, Co. Laois, R32 DTW5. The Notice of Appeal Form must be signed by the Appellant. Appeals and payments that are not received within the statutory deadline cannot be accepted.

26.1.4. Any licence decisions issued by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine are subject to the statutory 14 working day deadline i.e. The FAC Notice of Appeal Form must be received by this office along with the €200 fee within 14 working days of the DAFM decision. Full details of FAC procedures, appeals fee schedule, related appeal legislation, decisions and publications is provided at: http://www.agriappeals.gov.ie/forestryappealscommittee/

26.2 Appeals of DAFM decisions in respect of Grant Payments, Premiums or penalties

26.2.1 The Agriculture Appeals Act, 2001, amended by the Forestry Act 2014, includes Section 14A, which provides for an appeals service against decisions on forestry applications made by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. However, appeals in respect of any DAFM decisions related to grant payments, premium payments or penalties held or levied in respect of the operation of the Afforestation and Premium scheme by DAFM must be made to the Agriculture Appeals Office. Where an Applicant is refused on the basis of Scheme eligibility alone, they have 3 months to lodge notice of their appeal with the Agricultural Appeals Office. Full details of Agriculture Appeals Office procedures, related legislation, decisions and publications is provided at: http://www.agriappeals.gov.ie/

27. Change of Applicant

27.1 The Department must be notified in advance if:

i. a grant-aided forest is transferred, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of by the applicant during the term of the contract, up to and including payment of the final annual premium; or
ii. judgement mortgage or an inhibition or similar restriction is placed on the Folio for the afforested land during the term of the contract.

27.2 In the event of the death of the applicant i.e. owner, joint owner or joint manager who was claiming forestry premium, the Forest Service must be notified as soon as possible by the deceased's next-of-kin, legal personal representatives or registered forester.

27.3 When notice of a change of ownership is received by the Department, payments will be suspended until a new applicant is registered in the scheme. The new owner will be entitled to apply for all future annual premiums remaining under the afforestation contract, subject to providing proof of ownership and a completed and signed Form 5 to take over the obligations of the Scheme.

27.4 New applicants must submit all necessary documentation as early as possible and no later than one year after the date of the deed of transfer for the land ownership change, or the date that a deceased applicant's estate is settled. Failure to meet these deadlines may result in a new owner not being admitted to the scheme and the contract will, in effect, be terminated.

i. In every case, all documentation relating to change of ownership and applications for payments must be submitted before the expiry of the term of the contract. Applications for admission to the Scheme (Form 5) or for payment of premiums (Form 4) or 2nd instalment grants (Form 3) **made after the expiry of the term of the contract will not be considered**. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. delays in finalising a deceased person's estate), the date by which documents must be submitted may be extended at the discretion of the Minister.
ii. All decisions regarding eligibility for payment of grant and premiums will be made by reference to the level of compliance with the conditions of the Scheme, including the completion of outstanding remedial works, on the date of the deed of transfer of a forest or the date that a deceased applicant's estate is settled. For example, where remedial works have not been satisfactorily completed by the date of the deed of transfer, the new owner will be responsible for completion of the remedial works and, once satisfactorily completed, s/he will be eligible to apply for payment of premiums due for the period after the date of the deed and/or for the 2nd instalment grant if not already paid.
iii. The Minister will refuse payment of premiums and/or 2nd instalment grant to the previous owner(s) if s/he has failed to maintain the forest to the standard required under the Scheme for the period of the contract under his/her ownership.
iv. The Department will not divide grant or premium payments according to ownership for part of a year; individual grant or premium payments will not be split or subdivided. The parties to any sale or transfer should take these payments into account in the timing and terms of their legal arrangements and/or contracts for sale.
v. An exception may be made for the division of 2nd instalment grants if unpaid at the date of sale or transfer, provided that all parties notify the Department in writing that they have agreed on a mutually acceptable allocation of the grant and that both parties will indemnify the Minister against any claim arising in connection with or as a consequence of that agreement.

vi. In exceptional circumstances affecting a change of ownership process, at his or her discretion, the Minister may extend the closing date of a contract subject to such conditions as may be specified by the Minister.

vii. If a new owner is not willing to participate in the Scheme, or is unwilling to give an undertaking to protect and maintain the forest in accordance with the Scheme, the previous owner will be liable for repayment of all grants and premiums previously paid under the Scheme in respect of the afforested land.

viii. Where a debt is accrued under a contract for any reason and the cause of the debt has existed and/or continued during the ownership of more than one owner, the debt will be allocated in accordance with the amount of overpayment received by each owner; each owner will be responsible for repaying the overpayment s/he received.

27.5 Further information about the procedures involved when a grant-aided forest is being transferred, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of during the term of the contract is available at: gov.ie - Grant-aided Forestry - Change of Ownership or Applicant (www.gov.ie)

27.6 The Minister reserves the right to alter these procedures from time to time.

28. Joint Management Consent

28.1 A landowner may enter into a joint management arrangement with an immediate family member to jointly manage the forest and assign the afforestation grants and premiums to that family member. A joint management arrangement may only be made between **immediate family members**, namely the spouse, children, parents and/or siblings of the landowner. Joint Management Consent forms are available at Appendix 4 of the *Forestry Standards Manual* (on the website under Forestry Publications).

28.2 The owner of the land and the applicant are both liable for the repayment of grants and premiums paid if the applicant fails to abide by the conditions of the scheme or in the event of sale or transfer of ownership during the 20 year term of the scheme.

28.3 A joint management arrangement may be cancelled at any time provided the owner takes over the obligations of the scheme or, repays all grant and premium moneys already paid or, enters into a new joint management arrangement with another member of the immediate family willing to jointly manage the forest to Forest Service standards and take over the obligations and benefits of the scheme. Any such change should be notified to the Change of Applicant Section.

29. Management Plans

29.1 Applicants must provide the standard management plan information requested within the 1st grant application form and in the standard templates provided by the Department for all forests.

29.2 When a forest reaches 13 years of age and is 10 ha or greater, using the standard template provided by the Department, a detailed Forest Management Plan (FMP) must be submitted specifying the proposed management regime for the rotation. Payment of the 14th and subsequent premiums will be conditional on the receipt of this FMP and the forest being up to the required standard.

29.3 The Minister reserves the right to alter the area thresholds, templates and timing of the submission of the FMP during the duration of the scheme. Registered Foresters must discuss with all applicants, prior to deciding to afforest their lands, proposed future management objectives of the forest and development of the proposed crop, including timing of harvesting events and environmental protection.

30. Right of Entry

30.1 The Minister reserves the right to carry out inspections at reasonable times on any land submitted for pre-approval or on any land for which afforestation grants or premiums have been paid or claimed under this Scheme or any other forest-related Scheme. The provisions of the Section 24 of the Forestry Act 2014 in relation to authorised officers under the Act applies in this context. Applicants are obliged to ensure that, where required, adequate access to the land and forests is provided to allow inspections by the Department.

31. Responsibility for Forest Management

31.1 Responsibility for the successful establishment and management of a forest rests with the applicant. Where an applicant contracts the services of a third party to establish and/or manage the forest, and to prepare and submit claims, it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the third party contracted has sufficient insurances to indemnify the work undertaken. Any issue arising under this contract to the detriment of the applicant, such as inadequate work or preparing an inaccurate claim, etc., is a matter for the owner to resolve with the forester.

31.2 The inspection of a forest by the Department shall not relieve the Applicant of responsibility for the accuracy of applications submitted, the successful establishment or maintenance of the forest, or any responsibility to meet the required standards or terms and conditions of the scheme. The Department is not liable for errors (or financial loss) as a result of inaccurate claims or faulty workmanship by the applicant or his/her forester. The Department does not guarantee the success of any forest or bear any liability in respect of any forest for which it has granted

technical approval in any circumstances. It is the sole responsibility of the applicant who submits land for afforestation that the forest will successfully establish. If the Department subsequently determines that a forest, or any part thereof, has failed to establish successfully, the applicant will be required to repay all grants and premiums paid in respect of the entire forest or any part of the forest which has failed.

32. Insurance

32.1 Applicants should ensure that their forest has adequate insurance cover against damage from, inter alia, fire, windblow, pest and disease etc. In the event of significant plant deaths, as detailed in the *Forestry Standards Manual*, it is a condition of grant aid that losses will be replaced within the following two growing seasons or such other period as agreed, in writing, by the Department. Failure to replace losses may result in the recoupment of grants and premiums paid.

33. Failure to abide by the terms and conditions of the scheme

33.1 Where, for the purposes of obtaining payment under this *Scheme*, the applicant or a person acting on his/her behalf knowingly makes a false or misleading statement or withholds essential information, the applicant's participation in the Scheme may be terminated and all or part of the aid paid shall be repaid.

33.2 Where an Applicant or a person acting on his/her behalf fails to abide by the terms and conditions of the *Scheme*, or there is any material change in the circumstances of the applicant which would be in conflict with the letter or the spirit of the *Scheme*, the applicant's participation in the Scheme may be terminated and all or part of the aid paid shall be recovered by the Department. The Department may offset the amount owed from any other monies due to the applicant by the Department or it may seek to recover the amount as a simple contract debt in a court of competent jurisdiction.

33.3 The obtaining of financial aid under the *Scheme* by fraudulent means by the applicant or others acting alone or together may render such persons liable to prosecution.

34. Overpayments made in relation to a scheme contract

34.1. If it is subsequently found that any undue payment or overpayment has occurred in respect of any grant, premium or other payment made under the scheme, the Applicant will be liable to repay the entire amount of the undue payment or overpayment to the Department, regardless of how the undue payment or overpayment arose.

34.2 Amounts to be recouped may be deducted from future payments due to the Applicant under the forestry schemes or from payments due under other schemes administered by the Department. Where debts are not recovered within the period specified, the Department may take whatever action is deemed necessary for their recovery. The Department may also seek to recover the amount as a simple contract debt in a court of competent jurisdiction.

35. Review of Financial Aids

35.1 The Minister reserves the right in his absolute discretion to vary, where occasion so demands, the amount of financial aid wherever specified in the *Scheme*.

36. Procedures

36.1 The Minister reserves the right to alter from time to time the procedures to be followed in the operation of this *Scheme*.

37. Tax Clearance Requirement

37.1 It is a condition of this *Scheme* that all grant-aided activities shall be conducted in compliance with the laws of the State relating, inter alia, to tax and employment. Proof of compliance, such as the provision of Tax Clearance Certificates, may be required by the Department.

38. Value Added Tax

38.1 All grants paid under the Fixed Grant Scheme are exclusive of VAT.

39. Information and Data Protection

39.1 The Minister reserves the right to make information available to the public regarding the areas covered by the Scheme including the number of participants, farms, historical and archaeological sites, hectares covered, forest location etc. while continuing to observe the terms of the Data Protection Act.

39.2 Under State Aid rules (see Section 3) the Department will publish details of beneficiaries that fall within the categories described.

39.3 By declaring their eligibility and consent to apply for the afforestation scheme, applicants must agree to the release of non-personal information supplied by them in respect of their application to comply with current environmental consultation procedures. Furthermore, applicants consent to be contacted by the Department in respect of approved forestry training courses. Applicants must also consent to the release of their details to Teagasc and Timber Producer Groups who may subsequently communicate with applicants in relation to the forestry training and development and the harvesting of timber.

39.4 All information supplied by applicants in respect of an afforestation approval and/or grant claim and any supporting documentation shall be made available to any other Department or Agency or Local Authority for the purposes of consultation, Audits, Conditionality Controls and all Rural Development measures, and, as appropriate, in accordance with the requirements under the Freedom of Information Acts.

39.5 Information in relation to the operation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is available on the Department's website gov.ie - Data Protection (www.gov.ie). For further details on the Forestry Division Privacy Notice, please click here.

40. Further Conditions

40.1 The Minister may at any time lay down further conditions under this Scheme.

41. Forestry Act, 2014

41.1 All forests are protected by the Forestry Act, 2014 (and any Act that succeeds or replaces that Act), which controls felling of trees. Under this Act, with certain exceptions, it is illegal to cut down any tree, grant-aided or not, unless a Felling Licence has been obtained from the DAFM.

Annex 1

Forest Types, Grant and Premium Rates

General

The rates of Grant and Premium payable are determined by the Forest Type of the planted lands, and the area planted. FT's are defined below.

Land Types and Forest Types

Eligible land types for afforestation under the Scheme are described in the *Forestry Standards Manual* and the *Land Types for Afforestation* document published by DAFM.

Species Composition of new Forest Types

To be eligible for grant aid each plot within a forest must conform to one of the following Forest Types or FT's.

1.1 FT1 – Native Forests

FT1 comprises the creation of new native forest, principally to promote Native Forest biodiversity within the wider landscape and other ecosystem services such as soil and water protection and landscape enhancement. Areas planted under FT1 can be managed for wood production using continuous cover forestry practices, where compatible with onsite biodiversity.

Note, FT1 plots can be planted alongside other FT types within the same overall afforestation project.

Planting details are dictated by the Native Forest Framework (see Appendix 2 in the Forestry Standards Manual), which identifies the most appropriate Native Forest type for each particular plot, based principally on soil and vegetation. Species planted are restricted to those that are native to Ireland and prescribed by the Native Forest Framework, i.e. Scenarios 1-6 therein. The use of native provenance tree stock during establishment is prioritised. Establishment must also be achieved with minimal inputs, with cultivation largely limited to scrap or inverted mounding.

The following native species may be planted within plots of FT1, depending on the Native Forest type(s) identified for each plot using the Native Forest Framework:

Common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)
Downy birch (*Betula pubescens*)
Silver birch (*B. pendula*)
Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*)
Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*)
Sessile oak (*Q. petraea*)
Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)

Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*)
Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

FT1 applies to any plot proposed for Native Forest establishment and where one of the six scenarios under the Native Forest Framework is being proposed based on soil and vegetation, each plot under FT1 is assigned to a particular scenario that reflects the most appropriate Native Forest type for that plot. From there, the framework identified the species mix and planting design required to initiate that forest type. The Native Forest Framework, developed by DAFM in partnership with NPWS and Woodlands of Ireland, contains six different scenarios, together representing the main native forest types found in Ireland, together with their associated soil types. They are:

Scenario 1: Podzols (Oak-Birch-Holly Woodland)
Scenario 2: Brown Podzolics (Oak-Birch-Holly with Hazel Woodland)
Scenario 3: Brown Earths (Oak-Ash-Hazel Woodland)
Scenario 4: Gleys (Alder-Oak-Ash Woodland)
Scenario 5: Highly Modified Peat & Peaty Podzols (Pioneer Birch Woodland)
Scenario 6: Alluvial Floodplains (Alluvial Woodland)

The use of the Native Forest Framework to identify the most appropriate Native Forest type and associated species mixture and planting design is a requirement under FT1, alongside other rules that previously applied under the Native Woodland Establishment Scheme regarding site development, planting stock, the use of fertilisers, vegetation management and ongoing / future management, etc.

All species must be planted at a stocking rate of 2,500 stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2 metres.

1.2 FT2 – Forests for water

FT2 comprises the creation of new Native Forest in strategic locations where this land use change would deliver specific ecosystem services regarding the protection of water and aquatic ecosystems or would reinforce and expand areas of alluvial forests.

FT2 is designed to address specific needs including [inter alia] to help Ireland achieve the water quality objectives as set out in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2023 – 2027; to facilitate the expansion of Annex I Habitat 91E0 Alluvial Woodland, which has been classified at Bad Overall Status in Ireland by the NPWS and to help protect drinking water sources. Therefore, in order to be considered eligible, applications must meet one of the following targeted objectives:

- Plant in areas identified as Rank 1-3 on the EPA Pollution Impact Potential (PIP) Maps for phosphorus to break the pathway and protect the delivery point to the receiving aquatic zone.
- Plant in areas identified by the Local Authorities Waters Programme (LAWPRO) or Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advice Programme (ASSAP), for Native Forest creation as a mitigation.
- Plant in areas identified by Irish Water or the National Federation of Group Water Schemes for drinking water source protection.
- Plant in areas identified by Office of Public Works (OPW) as suitable for Natural Water Retention Measures.
- Plant in areas identified by Inland Fisheries Ireland for improvement of fisheries habitat and stream ecology.

- Plant to facilitate the expansion of the Habitats Directive Annex I Habitat: Alluvial Woodland 91EO.

Planting details are dictated by the Native Forest Framework, which identifies the most appropriate native forest type for each particular plot, based principally on soil and vegetation. Species planted are restricted to those that are native to Ireland and prescribed by the Native Forest Framework, i.e. Scenarios 1-6 therein. The use of native provenance tree stock during establishment is prioritised. Establishment must also be achieved with minimal inputs. Scenario 6 of the NF Framework will have a particular relevance under FT2, as it deals with alluvial woodland creation.

All species must be planted at a stocking rate of 2,500 stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2 metres.

Note, FT2 plots can be planted alongside other FT types within the same overall afforestation project.

The following native species may be planted within of plots of FT2, depending on the Native Forest type(s) identified for each plot using the Native Forest Framework (see Appendix 2 in the Forestry Standards Manual):

Common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)
Downy birch (*Betula pubescens*)
Silver birch (*B. pendula*)
Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*)
Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*)
Sessile oak (*Q. petraea*)
Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)
Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*)
Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

See Annex 3 for more details on Forests for Water.

1.3 FT3 – Forest Creation on Public Lands

The purpose of FT3 – Forest Creation on Public Lands is to encourage Public Bodies to establish new native forest on suitable land under their ownership and control. FT3 is specifically aimed at Public Bodies, including Government Departments and State Sponsored Organisations, Higher Education Authorities, and Local Authorities. FT3 provides funding for Native Forest area which are capable of delivering the following ecosystem services:

- The recreation of lost native woodland habitats, rich in biodiversity and cultural significance.
- The formation of ‘bio-corridors’ with and between other semi-natural habitats within the surrounding landscape.
- Carbon sequestration arising from woodlands that will exist in perpetuity.
- The protection and enhancement of water quality and associated aquatic ecosystems.
- The improvement of air quality in urban and peri-urban areas.
- Soil protection and the reclamation of former landfill and brownfield sites.

Any Public Body engaging in the Forest Creation on Public Lands will be making a strong statement to its customers, employees and partners, and to the public in general, regarding its corporate social responsibility and commitment to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals and targets set out under the Climate Action Plan and other national and international environmental priorities.

The scheme comprises three separate funding elements. Planting Element FT3 relates to Native Forest planting, and Recreation Elements 1 and 2 (both optional) relate to recreational facilities.

Forest Creation on Public Lands is primarily aimed at the creation of new Native Forest (under FT3). The scheme also includes funding for recreational development (under Elements 1 and 2), but this application of the scheme is *optional in nature*, to reflect situations where the Applicant may not wish to engage in recreational development, or where the site does not lend itself to this use.

Recreation Elements 1 and 2

Table below sets out the grant rates available under the optional Recreation Elements 1 and 2. Specific details regarding these Elements are as follows:

- Elements 1 and 2 are optional and do not have to be included in an application under Forest Creation on Public Lands.
- Any application under Elements 1 and/or 2 must be included in the corresponding Form 1 application for Planting Element FT3.
- Elements 1 and 2 are aimed at funding the installation of recreational facilities that enable access to, and enjoyment of, the woodland by the local and wider community.
- Facilities eligible under Element 1 include new walking trails, seating and signage, such as information boards, interpretive aids and way-markers. Facilities eligible under Element 2 include playground equipment and fitness training equipment appropriate to the forest setting.
- Grant payments for Elements 1 and 2 will be made on the basis of actual costs incurred, up to the maximum grant specified for each Element.
- In the case of Element 1 (Trails, Seating & Signage), the entire area planted under FT3 is eligible (e.g. a 6 ha site planted under FT3 is eligible for €3,800 x 6 ha), up to a maximum of €45,600 per application.
- In the case of Element 2 (Forest Playground), the grant is capped at €10,000 per application.
- Facilities funded under Elements 1 and 2 must be located within the footprint of eligible areas planted under FT3.
- The degree to which the site can be developed for recreational use will be determined by its proximity to a user group and the willingness of the applicant to develop the site for recreation. Therefore, the installation of recreational facilities into forests created under this Scheme is not compulsory.
- Where amenity is pursued, facilities must allow for reasonable access-for-all, to enable people of different ages and abilities to use and enjoy the forest. Organisations such as Enable Ireland (www.enableireland.ie) and the UK's Fieldfare Trust (www.fieldfare.org.uk) provide relevant information and guidance. Also see the DAFM's *Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners & Managers* (2006).
- DAFM recognises that many of the facilities envisaged under Elements 1 and 2 are highly specialised in nature and require the input of other specialised expertise and potentially, other funding streams. Applicants can pursue recreational development within the forest

through means other than Elements 1 and 2 of this Scheme, but must ensure that such development does not conflict with the requirements regarding FT3.

Overview of Recreation Elements 1 & 2

Recreation Elements	Facilities funded	Grant rate
Element 1	Trails, Seats & Signage etc	Up to €3,800 / ha, capped at €45,600 per application Payable from Year 4
Element 2	Forest Playground Equipment	Up to €10,000 per application Payable from Year 4

- In all cases, any facility installed must be suitably located and designed to be durable and in keeping with the woodland setting. See DAFM's *Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners & Managers* (2006) for relevant information and guidance.
- Any project seeking support under Recreation Elements 1 and 2 must also have a clearly identified and significant 'user group' regarding existing or future amenity use. Such user groups shall be identified at Form 1 stage where funding under these Elements is being sought. Where user groups are not present due to the site's isolation or for some other reason, the Recreation Elements of the scheme shall not be made available.
- Under Elements 1 and 2, the grant is paid in its entirety at Form 3 stage (alongside the 2nd Instalment for FT3), subject to the presentation of vouched eligible expenditure exclusive of VAT.
- Supporting documentation in the form of invoices or documents of equivalent probative value (exclusive of VAT) must be provided when claiming payment under Elements 1 and 2. All invoices must clearly state the supplier, date, main operations, quantities and costs incurred. Grant payments for Elements 1 and 2 will be made on the basis of actual costs incurred, up to the maximum grant specified for each Element.
- VAT for related costs is not eligible to be claimed under this scheme.

Form 1d: Notice of Commencement of the Installation of Recreational Facilities

Form 1d only applies in the case of projects where approval has been given at Form 1 stage under one or both of the Recreation Elements 1 and 2. It must be submitted *no later than 6 weeks before* installation works begin.

Within the above context, the Form 1d can be submitted any time *after* the submission of the Form 1c (Notice of Completion of Planting) application and *before* the 2nd Instalment Planting Grant (Form 3) is requested (using a Form 3). If there are any changes to what was approved at Form 1 stage, the Applicant must detail these in the Form 1d, to enable the Department to assess whether such changes are material in nature.

The installation of facilities under Element 1 and/or 2 can only take place if approved at Form 1 stage. No payment in relation to recreation facilities can be made without this prior approval.

Similarly, the Form 1d must be submitted to the Department's (Form 3 Section, *via* e-mail to forestry.2ndgrant@agriculture.gov.ie) *no later than 6 weeks before* installation works begin. No payment in relation to recreational facilities can be made without the submission of the Form 1d (plus details of any changes, as per above).

Upon completion of the installation works, a map showing the recreational facilities installed must be provided at Form 3 stage (see below).

As with FT1, the Native Forest Framework is used to identify the most appropriate native forest type for the plot. Once the scenario is identified, the framework then specifics which Native Forest species to plant, and the details regarding the species mix and planting design. The use of native provenance tree stock during establishment is prioritised. Establishment must also be achieved with minimal inputs, with cultivation largely limited to scrap or inverted mounding. The following native species may be planted within of plots of FT3, depending on the Native Forest type(s) identified for each plot using the Native Forest Framework (see Appendix 2 in the Forestry Standards Manual):

Common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)
Downy birch (*Betula pubescens*)
Silver birch (*B. pendula*)
Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*)
Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*)
Sessile oak (*Q. petraea*)
Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)
Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*)
Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

It may be the case that certain former landfill sites or 'brownfield' sites may be suitable for forest establishment. In these cases, a further 'Derelict Site Grant' of up to €500 / ha may be payable under FT3 to undertake specific operations necessitated by the site's status as a former landfill or brownfield site, subject to the production of relevant invoices for the amounts sought, for expenses specific to the planting of such sites. All species must be planted at a stocking rate of 2,500 stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2.0 metres.

Rules specific to FT3 Forest Creation on Public Lands

- Two or more plots may be grouped into a single Form 1 application. These plots should be grouped according to their proximity to each other, bearing in mind that small areas may prove uneconomical for contractors. Sites can only be grouped if they are located within the same geographical area, as defined by a circle with a 6 km diameter.
- Applicants can only apply for Recreation Elements 1 and/or 2 in parallel with an application under Planting Element FT3, and only for the same area (or less) proposed for planting under FT3.
- The Department is allowed to use all information related to any project under this Scheme, including information relating to carbon and other information included in the Ecosystem Services Report, where this option is adopted.

- At all times, the State maintains its primacy on reporting rights in relation to the carbon captured by native woodlands established under this Scheme, as part of its international reporting obligations[1].
- The Department can use the name of the Public Body in its promotional literature and other promotional events relating to the Woodland Creation on Public Lands Scheme or the related Afforestation Scheme. This may include (*inter alia*) press releases, brochures, seminars and field days.
- Where the Public Body engages in promotion, reporting or events relating to a project funded under this Scheme, it must refer to the Department's contribution. Suitable text is as follows: *"The creation of this new Native Forest was funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine through the Afforestation - Forest Creation on Public Lands Scheme"*. Where facilities are also involved under Elements 1 and 2, the Department's contribution must also be recognised. Where the logo of the Public Body appears in relation to the woodland, so too should the Department's logo, in equal size and prominence.
- Projects involving entrance fees or any other economic activity are excluded from this Scheme.
- There can be no barrier to general public access, unless required to protect the health and safety of the public. Access may also be restricted for specified periods of time where it is necessary to protect sensitive habitats or species or for some other environmental reason, or where vandalism or dumping are an issue. Where measures have been taken to prevent animal trespass, pedestrian access must be provided by a gate or stile or some other means. Public access does not confer any permanent rights to individual members of the public. If it proves necessary to restrict access to any recreational facility funded under this scheme, the Public Body must notify the Department in writing, specifying the reason for the restriction and the required duration of the restriction.
- The owner of the forest created under this scheme is encouraged to submit a Forest Management Plan with their application in Year 12, in a format agreed by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- For clarity in relation to communication and payments, each application under the Scheme must involve a single, clearly-identified Public Body.
- DAFM's Woodland Environment Fund do not apply to this Scheme.
- For Public Bodies who wish to engage a Natural Capital Facilitator to assess the ecosystem service potential of the project for promotional and other purposes, the Department has no role in this arrangement.
- The Forestry Act 2014 sets out the legal framework governing the felling of trees, situations where a tree felling licence is required, offences, and penalties for breaches of the legislation. Unless exempt, forests require a felling licence before felling can take place. Where clearfelling is undertaken, replanting is typically made a condition of any associated licence. In most cases, therefore, forest land will remain as such in perpetuity. The Department's document *Felling & Reforestation Policy* (2017) provides a consolidated source of information on the legal and regulatory framework relating to tree felling.
- All costs taken into account in respect of Recreation Elements 1 and 2 will exclude VAT.
- The owner is responsible for all issues surrounding safety and public liability in relation to projects receiving funding under this scheme. Applicants should ensure that their woodland

[1] The State's obligations to report greenhouse gas emissions and greenhouse gas removals in the land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sectors are set out under Regulation (EU) No 525/2013, while its accounting obligations are set out in Decision No 529/2013/EU up to 2020 and Regulation (EU) No 2018/841 ("the LULUCF Regulation") for the period 2021-2030. These relate to the EU's international commitments and obligations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the associated Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement.

has adequate public liability insurance. No liability shall be attached to the Minister for any injury, loss or damage to any person or property in respect of the forest.

1.4 FT4 – NeighbourWoods

FT4 funds the creation of new woodland designed to cater for forest recreation. The scheme is aimed at private landholders, working in partnership with local communities and local authorities where appropriate. FT4 forest type can adjoin an existing private forest that is also applying for Open Forest Scheme.

The type of recreational forest created can vary depending on size, location and intended uses. For example, new forests created under FT4 can reflect one or more of the following themes: close-to-home 'neighbourwoods', forest classroom developed for use by local school, 'heartwood forests' with a focus on physical exercise, or heritage forests celebrating some aspect of the area's natural, historical or cultural heritage. Forests developed under FT4 can be stand-alone or alongside an existing recreational forest, thereby expanding its area. They can be located in and around villages, towns and cities, or in a more rural setting, and where possible, should link into wider amenity networks, such as walking trails and greenways.

Typically, projects involving FT4 should involve consultation with intended user groups (often the local community), to ensure proper layout and design, with future walking trails, viewing spots, picnic areas and car parking left unplanted from the outset. (For guidance on developing new amenity woodlands, refer to Chapter 11 of the publication Amenity Trees and Woodlands: A Guide to their Management in Ireland (Tree Council of Ireland, 2010)).

Suitable projects under FT4 must have a clear potential for the development of an attractive amenity forest in areas that are strategically located, easily accessible and can be or are being well used by local people. Relevant factors for eligibility will include the suitability of location, the level of existing use, attractive natural features, local interest, linkage with wider walking routes and other amenities, etc. Suitable projects for FT4 establishment also place a particular focus on the provision of reasonable access-for-all, to enable people of different ages and abilities to use and enjoy the forest.

The species listed below are acceptable for establishment under FT4. All mixtures used must be silviculturally compatible, and full details to be provided in the application. Other species may also be acceptable to the Forest Service, but must be approved in advance. (The following included native, naturalised and non-native species. In selecting species, applicants under FT4 can opt to use the Native Forest Framework (see Appendix 2 in the Forestry Standards Manual) to identify the most appropriate Native Forest type for the site and the species and planting details needed to initiate that forest type.)

Broadleaf Species	**Conifer Species**
Common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)	Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*)
Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)	Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
Downy birch (*Betula pubescens*)	Grand fir (*Abies grandis*)
Silver birch (*B. pendula*)	Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)
Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*)	European larch (*Larix decidua*)
Spanish chestnut (*Castanea sativa*)	Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra* var. *nigra*)
Lime (*Tilia cordata*)	Corsican pine (*P. nigra* var. *laricio*)
Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*)	Lodgepole pine (*P. contorta*)
Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*)	Monterey pine (*P. radiata*)

Sessile oak (*Q. petraea*)	Scots pine (*P. sylvestris*)
Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)	Coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*)
Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)	Norway spruce (*Picea abies*)
Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)	Sitka spruce (*P. sitchensis*)
Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)	

It may be the case that certain former landfill sites or 'brownfield' sites may be suitable for forest establishment. In these cases, a further 'Derelict Site Grant' of up to €500 / ha may be payable under FT4 to undertake specific operations necessitated by the site's status as a former landfill or brownfield site, subject to the production of relevant invoices for the amounts sought, for expenses specific to the planting of such sites.

All species must be planted at a stocking rate of 2,500 stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2 metres.

Additional application requirements for FT4 at Form 1 stage

To be considered complete, the following additional documentation is also required:

- **Certified Species Map**, signed by the Registered Forester. This map is used for area and grant calculation. An original OSi 1:5,000 map is required, and the standard mapping conventions set out in the Forest Service *Forestry Standards Manual* apply. The areas relating to the different elements being applied for must be accurately mapped and labelled as follows:
    - NBR Establishment
    - NBR Facilities
- **NeighbourWood Plan**, which details various aspects of the project and how it meets key criteria, and also the specific works proposed under each element being applied for. The plan must adhere to the template provided in Annex 8 of this document. As well as addressing key aspects required in order to facilitate the Forest Service in its evaluation of the application, the NeighbourWood Plan will also serve as a basis for project partners to set out how the project will evolve over time. The NeighbourWood Plan must be signed by the Applicant and the Registered Forester.
- **Site location map**, based on a Discovery Series 1:50,000 map and showing the main access approach onto the site. The standard mapping conventions set out in the Forest Service *Forestry Standards Manual* apply.
- Documentation clearly demonstrating partnerships on which the proposal is based. Such partnerships will typically involve the landowner (public or private), local community.

Element 2: Forest Recreation Facilities

Element 2 provides funding for the installation and of suitable recreational facilities, including general features such as trails, seats, signs (including directional and interpretative) and parking to cater for the general user, and specialised facilities for particular user groups. Under Element 2, projects can receive up to €4,200 / ha, based on approved works and subject to an upper limit of 12 ha.

Element 2 is aimed at funding general facilities that enable access to, and enjoyment of, the woodland by the general community. Such facilities include footpaths, signage, waymarkers, car-parking, seating and picnic tables.

Eligible operations are as follows:

- Materials, items and works associated with the installation of appropriate recreational facilities within an existing Open Forest (including Open Forests established under FT4).

- Other appropriate operations, where pre-approved by the Forest Service.

All facilities must satisfy the following criteria:

- All facilities (including footpaths) must be laid out in a logical sequence, with a focus on facilitating access for all.
- Facilities must be sensitively designed and appropriate to the forest setting.
- Facilities must be high quality, durable and resistant to damage.
- Primary footpaths should be looped in nature and should have a durable walking surface (hardcore and top-dressed) of at least 1.5 metres in width.
- Facilities must be appropriately integrated throughout the entire site.
- Overall, favour quality over quantity. Focus on positioning a carefully selected number of high quality facilities at key points within the woodland.
- Provide full details of the proposed facilities, in the application form (i.e. 'Form 1'). This includes proposed positions, dimensions and other specifications. Established design standards should be used where available, and cited in the application form. If possible, include photos of the proposed facilities (or similar) *in situ* elsewhere.
- Unless otherwise agreed in advance with DAFM, the positioning and design specifications detailed in the application form mut be adhered to. Applicants are encouraged to adhere to established standards and specifications regarding outdoor recreational facilities, while also reflecting the forest setting.

See the Forest Service's *Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* for information on facilities for woodland recreation. Projects involving recreational trail development should adhere to the trail standards recommended by the National Trails Office (www.irishtrails.ie/national_trails_office). When preparing an application under Element 2, a preliminary trail development survey should be completed to assist project development groups in quantifying all necessary and appropriate works.

Facilities eligible under Element 2 can include specifically designed 'calorie-count' walks and fitness trails, in order to promote green exercise.

Other facilities targeting particular user groups can also be submitted, e.g. hides for birdwatching. However, in such cases, DAFM will require proof of consultation with the intended user group, and demonstration that the plans for the facilities in question adhere to recognised standards relating to the use / activity in question.

Other types of facilities deemed by the Forest Service to be highly specialised in nature (such as fitness training equipment and children's' playground equipment) will not be eligible for funding under the Open Forest Scheme, and Applicants are encouraged to seek alternative sources of funding for these features. Contact DAFM for clarification, if uncertain as to whether or not a particular facility is eligible under Element 2.

Under Element 2: Facilities, projects are eligible for funding for approved works, up to a maximum of €4,200 / ha and an upper limit of 12 ha, as set out previously.

NeighbourWood Plan

The application process under FT4 NeighbourWood involves the completion and submission of a NeighbourWood Plan. As well as addressing key aspects required in order to facilitate the Forest Service in its evaluation of the application, the NeighbourWood Plan will also serve as a basis for project partners to set out how the project will evolve overtime.

In order to ensure that key aspects are addressed, the NeighbourWood Plan must adhere to the following template, addressing each part in turn.

The NeighbourWood Plan must be developed by the Applicant and a Forest Service Registered Forester, and with input from the various project partners.

Maps are required to illustrate particular information within the NeighbourWood Plan. These maps, to be incorporated into the plan itself, must adhere to the following conventions:

- Maps must be appropriately scaled for clarity, and must be appropriately titled and cross referenced with relevant text elsewhere within the plan. Aerial photos can be useful in this regard but must be eligible.
- Each map should accurately represent the information being illustrated, and be legible.
- In all maps, the perimeter of the overall NeighbourWood Scheme site should be outlined in red.
- Features and attributes must be clearly indicated using symbols, colours, letters, text and-arrows, etc. and a concise legend. Linear features (e.g. existing footpaths, streams, hedgerows) should be indicated using colour-coding, and individual features (e.g. view points, proposed seating) by letters or symbols.
- Applicants should be aware of the value of aerial photographs for mapping, particularly in locating existing site features, habitats, boundaries and reference points. The NeighbourWood Plan can be accompanied by additional material such as site photos, aerial photos, supporting literature, letters of support and local newspaper articles.

1.5 FT5 – Emergent Forest / Rewilding

Emergent Forest is defined as any area that is dominated by trees, as opposed to shrubs, and where the canopy height is greater than 1.5 metres. Emergent Forest frequently develops as a precursor to high climax species Native Forest and is often found within inaccessible land parcels, on out farms separated from the main land holding or on other extensively managed farmland. Emergent Forest can be open or dense and impenetrable, and it can occur on areas of dry, damp or waterlogged ground. Common trees include willows, birches and hazel.

Forest establishment under FT5 involves the protection and enhancement (primarily through enrichment planting, if needed) of young Native Forests already emerging on the site though natural regeneration. These early stage ‘emergent’ forests typically comprise pioneer species of trees and scrubs arising from adjoining hedgerows and forests, and / or through the introduction of seed onto the site from further afield, by wind, birds, etc. Incorporating emergent forests into the Forestry Programme, through FT5, protects these ‘rewilding’ habitats and ensures that they will continue to develop into native forests reflecting the natural potential vegetation for that site.
FT5 aims to protect this emergent forest and to enable it to continue its natural progression over time to native high forest. These emergent forests represent an important biodiversity feature within the landscape, with the potential for delivering many ecosystem services. Also, with retention and appropriate intervention (e.g. fencing, respacing), they have the potential for future wood production under CCF. FT5 is designed to encourage landowners to consider the possibility of retaining existing emergent forest and to allow this habitat to grow on as native woodland, for both environmental and wood production purposes.

To be eligible under this category, the emergent forest must comprise early-stage forest dominated by native pioneer species of trees and scrub(*). It must have an average canopy height of 1.5 metres or greater, with a clear potential for canopy closure within 6 years. Open gaps in the emergent canopy can be accepted within the area submitted under FT5, up to one-third of the area of the plot. Such gaps must be targeted with enrichment planting, selecting species from the appropriate Native Forest Framework scenario identified for the plot and must be planted at a stocking rate of 1,100 stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 3.0 x 3.0 metres. Alternatively, group planting may also be used in

open areas within the treated area of the emerging forests. Groups of 21 trees, must be planted at a spacing of 1 metre by 1 metre. Spacing between the groups shall be kept at 10 metres by 10 metres resulting in 100 groups to the hectare. Tree species planted in groups must be of climax species such as Oak with the pioneer species natural emerging between the groups.

Furthermore, the plot must be situated on mineral soil. (This requirement is designed to focus resources on the less frequent types of emergent forests, which are often at the greatest risk of being removed.)

(* The type of habitat eligible under FT5 generally equates to Scrub/Transitional Woodland (WS1) in Fossitt's *A Guide To Habitats In Ireland* (2000). Note, existing Native Forests that may be low-lying in nature (e.g. hazelwood) are not eligible under FT5, as these have already undergone their early succession stages and already exhibit typical characteristics of the potential natural vegetation type for that site.) Support will be available under FT5 for the following eligible operations:

- Purchase of suitable native planting stock for enrichment planting
- Ground preparation, where appropriate (e.g. light scarification to facilitate natural regeneration)
- Enrichment planting in existing canopy gaps within the emergent woodland
- Forest protection (fencing and tree guards)
- Clearance of invasive species such as laurel, rhododendron and non-native tree species
- Maintenance (including vegetation management)
- Woodland edge management
- Maintenance of open spaces, rides and glades
- Re-spacing
- On application, other related operations, as deemed appropriate and as approved by DAFM.

Note, FT5 plots can be planted alongside other FT types within the same overall afforestation project.

The following native species may be planted within of plots of FT5, depending on the native forest type(s) identified for each plot using the Native Forest Framework (see Appendix 2 in the Forestry Standards Manual):
Common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)
Downy birch (*Betula pubescens*)
Silver birch (*B. pendula*)
Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*)
Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*)
Sessile oak (*Q. petraea*)
Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)
Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*)
Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

1.6 FT6 – Broadleaf (mainly oak and beech)

A FT6 plot is generally comprised of pure oak (pedunculate oak or sessile oak). This FT is aimed at the growing of high-quality broadleaves to produce quality hardwood timber. Beech may also be acceptable for planting in FT6 plots. Oak (or beech) must be planted pure at a stocking rate of 2,500 stems/ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2.0 metres.

On large sites where additional shelter is required, an appropriate nurse species may be introduced. The nurse species can make up 30% of the total stems per ha. Alternate lines of broadleaf / conifer are not allowed. Line mixtures of 1 in 10 are allowed. Remove the nurse species if or when they begin to dominate or interfere with the height and crown development of the main crop species oak/ beech. A nurse species can be planted in groups, they can consist of 25 to 100 trees max, nurse groups must be evenly distributed across the site.

1.7 FT7 – Diverse Broadleaf

This forest type is comprised of an acceptable broadleaf species, other than oak/ beech. This FT is aimed at the growing of high-quality broadleaves to produce quality hardwood timber. The following species may be planted as part of FT7 plots:

Common alder (Alnus glutinosa)
Italian alder (Alnus cordata)
Southern beech (Nothofagus procera/Nothofagus obliqua)
Downy birch (Betula pubescens)
Silver birch (Betula pendula) *
Wild cherry (Prunus avium)
Spanish (Sweet) Chestnut (Castanea sativa)
Common hornbeam (Carpinus betulus)
Common lime (Tilia × europaea/Tilia cordata/Tilia platyphyllos)
Norway maple (Acer platanoides)
Red oak (Quercus rubra)
Rowan* (Sorbus aucuparia)
Sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus)

*Tree species not currently on the Forest Service list of approved species. These species may be considered in certain circumstances after consultation with the Forest Service.

All species must be planted pure at a stocking rate of 2,500 stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2.0 metres. On larger sites where additional shelter is required, an appropriate nurse species may be introduced. The nurse species can make up 30% of the total stems per ha. Remove the nurse species if or when they begin to dominate or interfere with the height and crown development of the main crop species.

1.8 FT8 – Agroforestry

Forest establishment under FT8 has been designed to create silvopastoral agroforestry systems which combine forestry and pasture on the same area of land. The measure will allow farmers to farm in a more sustainable way. The trees will mitigate the negative effects of climate change, improve animal welfare, increase biodiversity, produce renewable energy, protect water, and produce quality timber. This measure will afford the land shelter and will contribute to soil amelioration.

Site types should typically contain free draining mineral soils and have no requirement for additional drainage. There should be no requirement for herbicides or fertilizers. Supplements for grass growth would need to be agreed with organic section if classified as organic. Elevations must be below 200 metres and in sheltered areas.

Ground preparation may include pit planting, ripping or the use of an auger. Headlands for machinery will be required to allow for machines to turn at the end of each row subject to environmental setbacks.

Vegetation control can be carried out by livestock or in the process of cutting hay or silage. If vegetation is growing within the tree shelter the shelter can be pushed up and grass pulled out at the bottom.

A minimum stocking rate of 400 trees per ha is required. Planting can be singly (5 x 5 metre), in rows or in groups. A minimum eligible plot size of 0.5 ha is needed. When trees are planted in rows the maximum distance between rows should be 10 metres, trees within the rows should be no closer than 3 metres, the balance in tree numbers to be made up along field margins. Acceptable broadleaf species include oak, sycamore and cherry. Plants should be at least 60 cm. Other species, including conifers, may be considered on a site-by-site basis. It is acceptable to have 15% fruit or/and nut species, it is recommended that these are planted in sunny unshaded areas in groups where they will not have to compete with timber producing species.

Forest establishment under FT8 has been designed to create silvopastoral agroforestry systems which combine forestry and pasture on the same area of land. A stocking rate of minimum of 400 trees per ha (at equal planting spacing) is acceptable with a minimum eligible plot size of be 0.5 ha and minimum tree-to-tree width of 10 m. All trees are required have 2 stakes and a shelter per tree to protect trees from browsing, rubbing or fraying. Acceptable broadleaf species include oak, sycamore and cherry Italian alder, red alder, walnut and red oak. Other species, including conifers may be considered on a site-by-site basis.

The following agricultural activities will be permitted within the established FT8 plot where such activity is compatible with protecting the trees:

Pasture: Grazing by sheep, poultry or young calves is permitted during the spring, summer and autumn months for the first 6-8 years, depending on tree growth and soil conditions. The trees must be protected.

Each tree will be protected with a rigid tree shelter of 1.5 metres tall. The shelter will be supported and protected by two posts. The first post will be square (7 cm wide) or a half round (13-16 cm) and will provide a flat surface which will help prevent the shelter being turned around the post. The second post (7 cm) will protect the shelter from being crushed. Both posts should be 1.5 metres tall. The tree shelters should be checked regularly ensuring that the posts are not pushing in on the shelters. The shelter will be secured to the posts with wire.

Thereafter, when tree shelters are replaced with plastic mesh and larger animals may then be considered. Trees might need to be pruned, if growth is vigorous, to prevent the crown becoming top heavy.

Fodder: Silage and hay production is permitted. It is important that appropriate machinery is used when cutting silage and/or hay to ensure that the trees are not inadvertently damaged.

Areas established under FT8 are considered to meet the definition of forest as defined in the Forestry Act 2014 and are therefore subject to felling licence requirements and a replanting obligation post felling. For state aid rules 100% of eligible costs accrued for establishment of FT can be grant aided. Support for the establishment of demonstration plots for research purposes may also be considered under this scheme.

Silvoarable Pilot

Silvoarable agroforestry is a system of growing crops of cereals, fruit and vegetables growing amongst trees. This measure will not require tree shelters as there will be no grazing. The crops will be grown amongst single trees, rows or groups of trees. This Pilot measure will allow farmers to farm in a more sustainable way. The trees will mitigate the negative effects of climate change, improve animal welfare, increase biodiversity, produce renewable energy, protect water, and produce quality timber. This measure will afford the land shelter and will contribute to soil amelioration.

This measure will need a clear strategic plan taking into consideration a long-term vision for the farming enterprise. Headlands for machinery will be required to allow for machines to turn at the end of each row subject to environmental setbacks. Horticultural input into training and design would be beneficial and could be incorporated into the training in Intervention 5.

Once land is converted to agroforestry, it will be classified as forest land and the provisions of forest legislation will apply. Eligible tree species include broadleaves and conifers and will be assessed on a site-by-site basis. Fruit and nut trees can account for 20% of species planted. The financial support through grant aid will be less than that for Silvopastoral Systems in that the plants will not require the same level of protection. In some cases, rabbit protection or deer fencing may be required.

A Grant of €6,000 will be paid in two instalments. The first instalment, representing approximately 75% of the total grant due, will be payable immediately after planting. The second instalment (25%) will be payable not sooner than 4 years after planting. In situations where shelters are not required a 30% reduction will be imposed unless other costs can be demonstrated. Fencing Grant is also available.

The financial support through grant aid will be less than that for Silvopastoral Systems in that the plants will not require the same level of protection. In some cases, rabbit protection or deer fencing may be required.

Premiums will be paid for 10 years at a rate of €829 per annum.

Annual Target. This measure should initially be set up on a pilot bases, with a maximum of 30ha per year for 4 projects for a maximum of 7.5ha per project.

Forest Gardening Pilot

To establish carefully planned and constructed forest gardens. The objective is to provide robust, small-scale forests that provide a source of organic forest food. The trees will mitigate the negative effects of climate change, improve animal welfare (most likely poultry), increase biodiversity, produce renewable energy, protect water, and produce quality timber. The income from the forest produce will help diversify the farm income.

Starting with a 1 ha limit per landowner with a national ceiling of 6ha annually. A design plan would need to be submitted with each application. Up to 40% of the trees planted could be fruit and nut trees. Once land is converted to agroforestry, it will be classified as forest land and the provisions of forest legislation will apply.

Funding will cover the cost of design and establishment. A premium will be paid in recognition of the environmental benefits the trees are giving, in accordance with the grant premium payment structure. Trial plots should be considered in the short term as design and layout are critical for this measure to explore the best approach for Irish conditions.

A Grant of €6,000 will be paid in two instalments. The first instalment, representing approximately 75% of the total grant due, will be payable immediately after planting. The second instalment (25%) will be payable not sooner than 4 years after planting. Fencing Grant is also available.

Premiums will be paid for 10 years at a rate of €829 per annum.

Note – Silvoarable and Forest Gardening Pilots will not open for application with the Afforestation Scheme. A circular will issue when they launch.

1.9 FT9 – Seed Orchards

The aim of forest establishment under FT9 is to increase the quantity and quality of forest tree seed through support for establishment of seed orchards.

A seed orchard is a forest stand of selected individual trees or families which is isolated or managed so as to avoid or reduce pollination from outside sources, and managed to produce frequent, abundant and easily harvested crops of seed. Typically seed orchards represent populations in which superior individuals (known as 'plus trees') are planted together so that mutual mating can occur. Seed orchards may also be used to increase the production of reproductive material from indigenous, scattered, or endangered tree species, for example to increase the availability of reproductive material for native woodland establishment or conservation.

FT9 supports the establishment of outdoor seed orchards. Seed orchards will only be supported under this measure if they are compliant with Council Directive 1999/105/EC on the marketing of forest reproductive material as transposed into Irish law by SI No. 618/2002 - European Communities (Marketing of Forest Reproductive Material) Regulations 2002. It follows therefore that seed orchards must meet the minimum requirements for the approval of basic material intended for the production of reproductive material to be certified as either 'Qualified' or 'Tested'.

The maximum eligible area for outdoor seed orchards is 5 ha and while technical approval for a larger area may be granted by the Department, available funding will be capped to a maximum of 5 ha. Public and private forest-holders will be eligible for support. Not all seed orchard proposals will be funded. For example, where there is sufficient supply of seed of approved species and provenances already being produced, support will not be approved.

FT9 supports the establishment of seed orchards compliant with Council Directive 1999/105/EC for the following species:

- Pedunculate oak (Quercus robur)
- Sessile oak (Quercus petraea)
- Sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus)
- Spanish chestnut (Castanea sativa)
- Sitka spruce (Picea sitchensis)
- Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris)
- Silver birch (Betula pendula)
- Downey birch (Betula pubescens)
- Common alder (Alnus glutinosa)

Seed orchards for native tree species, in addition to those listed above, may also be funded under the Scheme, on application. This may include, for example, ash (Fraxinus excelsior) with demonstrated

putative tolerance to the ash dieback pathogen *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, or seed orchards of native broadleaf species of indigenous origin where the purpose of establishment is gene conservation.

FT 9 Seed orchards applicants must include:

- A Forest Management Plan (FMP) regardless of their area.
- An Orchard Description document to include:
    - A description of the species and genetic material including supporting information that demonstrate that the basic material meets the minimum requirements to be certified as ‘Qualified’ or ‘Tested’.
    - A description of site location and orientation, including distance to potential contaminating pollen, soil description and suitability.
    - The plot layout taking into account pollination requirements and outcrossing (where relevant), methodologies envisaged for encouraging seed production, arguments in support of establishing the seed orchard being proposed and any other information that describes the proposal.
    - In the case of clonal seed orchards, the application must also include an indication of the number of genotypes, their origin and the number of ramets used per genotype.
    - In the case of breeding seedling orchards, the application must also include an indication of the number of individual parent trees which contributed sets of progeny for the orchard and the number of trees per family in the orchard to be established.
    - Details of crossing design and field layout.
    - Qualifications and experience of the key personnel involved.

1.10 FT10 – CCF - Continuous Cover Forestry

FT10 is comprised of the establishment of multifunctional forests which are suitably structured to be managed as continuous cover forests from establishment to produce long lived timber products to maximise carbon storage. Multifunctional forests managed under Continuous Cover Forestry combine conservation and wood production, they promote management strategies which optimises the utilisation of ecosystem services through sustainable forest management principles. Increasing forests resilience to climate change and storm damage while promoting the recreational, amenity and cultural values of forests through the establishment of diverse species composition and forest structure. Forest to be managed for Continuous Cover Forestry must select one of two scenarios present below.

Scenario	**Planting mixture**
Scenario 1: Sitka Spruce/ other conifer, Oak plus other broadleaves.	Sitka Spruce (55%), other conifer (25%) (minimum of two other conifer species), Oak (10%) other broadleaves (10%). Changes + or – 20% for each species will be accepted. (Sitka Spruce to a max of 55% of total area). Species selection should reflect site type. Conifer can be planted in Intimate line mixtures or Group mixtures (25 to 100 trees per group). Broadleaves suited to the site also to be incorporated in small groups 25 to 100 trees per group. Minor species to be planted along the edge of the emerging canopy and / or alongside hedgerows. Mandatory minimum 20% broadleaf requirement for this FT
Scenario 2: Norway Spruce or other Conifer and other broadleaves.	Norway Spruce (55%), other conifer (25%) (minimum of two other conifer species), Oak (10%) Other broadleaves (10%). Changes + or – 20% for each species will be accepted. (Norway Spruce to a max of 55% of total area). Species selection should reflect site type. Conifer can be planted in Intimate line mixtures or Group mixtures (25 to 100 trees per group). Broadleaves suited to the site also to be incorporated in small groups 25 to 100 trees per group. Minor species to be planted along the edge of the emerging canopy and / or alongside hedgerows. Mandatory minimum 20% broadleaf requirement for this FT

*Other planting mixtures may be considered on a case-by-case bases.

All species must be planted at a stocking rate of 2,500 stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2.0 metres.

Norway spruce (Picea abies)
Sitka spruce (Picea sitchensis)
Serbian spruce (Picea ormorika)
Lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta)
Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris)
Corsican pine ((Pinus nigra (var. laricio)))
Austrian pine (Pinus nigra (var. maritima))
Monterey pine (Pinus radiata)
European larch (Larix decidua)
Douglas fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii)
Grand fir (Abies grandis)
Western hemlock (Tsuga heterophylla)
Western red cedar (Thuja plicata)
Monterey Cypress (Cupressus macrocarpa)
Coast redwood (Sequoia sempervirens)
Lawson cypress (Chamaecyparis lawsoniana)

Common alder (Alnus glutinosa)
Italian alder (Alnus cordata)
Beech (Fagus sylvatica)
Southern beech (Nothofagus procera/Nothofagus obliqua)
Downy birch (Betula pubescens)
Silver birch (Betula pendula)
Wild cherry (Prunus avium)
Spanish (Sweet) Chestnut (Castanea sativa)
Common hornbeam (Carpinus betulus)
Common lime (Tilia × europaea/Tilia cordata/Tilia platyphyllos)
Norway maple (Acer platanoides)
Pedunculate oak (Quercus robur)
Sessile oak (Quercus petraea)
Red oak (Quercus rubra)
Rowan (Sorbus aucuparia)
Sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus)

*Tree species not currently on the Forest Service list of approved species. These species may be considered in certain circumstances after consultation with the Forest Service.

1.11 FT11 – Mixed high forests: Diverse Conifer, minimum 20% broadleaves

This forest type is comprised of a plot planted with an acceptable conifer species (but not Sitka spruce) with a minimum 20% broadleaves. Acceptable conifer species are as follows:

Norway spruce (Picea abies)
Serbian spruce (Picea ormorika)
Lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta)
Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris)
Corsican pine ((Pinus nigra (var. laricio))
Austrian pine (Pinus nigra (var. maritima))
Monterey pine (Pinus radiata)
European larch (Larix decidua)
Douglas fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii)
Grand fir (Abies grandis)
Western hemlock (Tsuga heterophylla)
Western red cedar (Thuja plicata)
Monterey Cypress (Cupressus macrocarpa)
Coast redwood (Sequoia sempervirens)
Lawson cypress (Chamaecyparis lawsoniana)

The conifer species can be planted pure or intimately mixed throughout an FT11 plot or planted in groups or a combination of both (where silviculturally compatible). The broadleaf content must be at least 20% of the total number of trees planted. All species must be planted at a stocking rate of 2,500

stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2.0 metres. Suitable broadleaf species that can be planted intimately in FT11 plots are as per those species listed for FT10 above. Other broadleaf species may also be considered on request.

1.12 FT12 – Mixed high forests with Sitka Spruce, minimum 20% broadleaves

This forest type is comprised of a plot of Sitka spruce plus a minimum of 20% broadleaves by area. A plot established under FT12 comprises an intimate mix of Sitka spruce and /or Lodgepole Pine together. The broadleaf content must be at least 20% by area. As per the conifer component the broadleaf species can be intimately mixed throughout the forest or planted in groups through the forest, or a combination of both (where silviculturally compatible with the main species).

All species must be planted at a stocking rate of 2,500 stems / ha on all sites and at a spacing of 2.0 x 2.0 metres. Suitable broadleaf species that can be planted in FT12 plots are as per those species listed in Section 8.1, Table 8.4 of the Forestry Standards Manual. Other broadleaf species may also be considered on request.

1.13 Grant and Premium Rates

The maximum grant and premium rates are detailed in Tables 1 and 2 below. The afforestation grant is a fixed grant to cover the costs incurred in the establishment of a forest and paid exclusive of VAT over two instalments immediately after planting (75% grant payment) and after successful establishment (25%) four years after. An additional allowance for fencing (to the maximum rates detailed below) is payable with the 1st grant instalment in Table 2.

Table 1: Fixed Grant Rates

	Forest Type	Grant/ha	Annual Premium/ha	Duration of Premiums for farmers	Duration of Premiums for non-farmers
FT1	Native forests	€6,744	€1,103	20	15
FT2	Forests for water*	€6,744	€1,142	20	15
FT3	Forests on Public Lands**	€10,544	€1,103	n/a	15
FT4	NeighbourWoods***	€10,200	€1,142	20	15
FT5	Emergent Forest	€2,500	€350	20	15
FT6	Broadleaf, mainly oak and beech	€6,744	€1,037	20	15
FT7	Diverse Broadleaf	€4,314	€973	20	15
FT8	Agroforestry	€8,555	€975	10	10
FT9	Seed Orchards	€10,000	€1,142	20	15
FT10	Continuous Cover Forestry	€5,421	€912	20	15
FT11	Mixed high forests: Diverse Conifer, 20% broadleaves	€4,452	€863	20	15
FT12	Mixed high forests with mainly spruce, 20% broadleaves	€3,858	€746	20	15

* Additional payment of €1,000 per ha will be paid to landowner on completion of planting

** Grant includes Trails, Seats & Signage Facilities payment

*** Grant includes Facilities payment

Table 2: Fencing Rates

Fence Type	€ per metre (IS436 rates)	€ per metre (non IS436 Rates)	IS436 (160m/ ha cap)	Non IS436 (120m/ha cap)
Stock	5.50	4.50	Max €880/ha at forest level	Max €540/ha at forest level
Stock/ Sheep	7.00	5.00		
Stock/ Rabbit	7.00	6.50		
Upgrade to deer	9.00	8.00	€1,440/ha	€960/ha
Deer	18.00	14.00	All deer fencing must be approved in advance. Only sheltered, fertile sites and where at least 70% of the area enclosed by the deer fence of FT 1 to FT11 is eligible.	
Deer/ Rabbit	18.00 New Deer fencing capped at €2,880/ha	14.00 New Deer fencing capped at €2,100/ha		

The maximum metres of fencing funded will be based on the total lengths of new fences erected to Forest Service specifications and based on the area of the forest multiplied by 160 metres, where IS436 is used exclusively, irrespective of fence type erected. Maximum fencing cap of €50,000 per forest. Where non IS436 deer fencing is used a cap of 150 metres per ha will apply to the deer fencing element and capped at €2,100 per ha.

Forest Creation – Proposed Environment Report Grant (ERG)

All afforestation projects can now avail of the ERG to help offset additional regulatory requirements in the application process.

Table 3: Environment Report Grant

Environment report and associated grant	The aims of the environment report and associated grant are: (i) to increase the quality of afforestation applications, particularly in relation to potential environmental sensitivities; (ii), to increase the throughput of applications by DAFM; and (iii) to ensure applicants and their agents are reasonably reimbursed for the additional costs associated with the required standard and scope of the environmental reports submitted. Payments for the environmental report will be paid at form 2 stage on completion of planting. Environmental reports that are eligible for this grant may include: • A Pre-Screening Report • A Habitat Description and Map • An Ecology Report covering non-Appropriate Assessment ecology requirements • A Natura Impact Statement. • Archaeology Impact Assessment • Archaeology Monitoring Report Other reports, such as bird surveys, botanical surveys water and landscape-related assessments and Environmental Impact Assessment Reports may also be required and are also eligible.	Grant €450 per ha for first ha €400 for second ha €350 for third ha €50 per ha for subsequent hectares to a maximum of 20 hectares

Annex 2 Forest Rules and Standards

2.1 General

Each afforestation project must comply with the Forest Rules set out in this Annex.

2.2 Rule 1 - 20% Broadleaves

All afforestation applications must be made up of a minimum of 20% broadleaved species by area. This requirement may be met by (1) discrete plots of broadleaves and/or (2) additional broadleaves (ADB) planted for landscape and or environmental reasons, including broadleaves planted in a FT12 or FT11 plot to satisfy the 20% minimum broadleaves species requirement, or a combination of these. Where ADB is planted within a forest the number of trees planted must make up a minimum of 20% minimum of the total numbers of trees of the plot.

2.3 Areas of Biodiversity Enhancement (ABE)

Areas of Biodiversity Enhancement (ABE) are areas which are suitable for afforestation planting where the potential for a commercial forest crop is foregone for the purposes of retaining open spaces and habitats for biodiversity.

The ABE eligible for grant aid will not comprise more than 15% of the total claimed area of the project i.e. at least 85% of the claimed area submitted for grant aid must have trees planted at the required stocking.

Detailed requirements and eligibility criteria for ABEs are set out in the *Forestry Standards Manual* and in the "Forest Biodiversity Guidelines".

2.4 Minimum Areas:

Minimum area requirements vary for conifer and broadleaf forests and their associated plots:

Mixed High Forests:

a) A proposed conifer Mixed High Forest or plot not adjoining other forests must not be less than 1 hectare in total.
b) Where a proposed Mixed High Forest adjoins existing forests of 0.75ha or greater then a minimum Mixed High Forest of 0.25 hectare applies.
c) A Mixed High Forest plot within a forest must not be less than 0.25 hectare.

Broadleaf forests:

a) A broadleaf forest must not be less than 0.1 hectare.
b) A broadleaf plot must also not be less than 0.1 hectare.
c) An Agroforestry plot must be not less than 0.5 ha.

2.5 Minimum Widths:

The minimum width applies to the actual planted area and does not take into account areas of the forest left unplanted (e.g. buffers along roads, rivers, streams etc.).

All FT's plots must be 20 metres or greater in width, as measured tree-to-tree (i.e. excluding open spaces such as aquatic buffer zones, public road setbacks and archaeological exclusion zones).

In certain situations, e.g. to cater for landscape design and existing features, 10% of the proposed area can be less than 20 metres in width.

For the purposes of the *Afforestation Scheme* the above minimum width criteria will be applied at the individual plot level. A forest made up of a number of plots must satisfy the minimum width rules for every plot.

2.6 Species Selection

The tree species proposed for planting should be chosen according to the suitability of the species to the site and soil. A list of the acceptable tree species for grant aid under the Scheme is set down in the *Forestry Standards Manual*. A list of the acceptable native tree species for grant aid under the Scheme is set down in the Annex 1, 1.1 Native Forests and in Native Forest Framework (see Appendix 2 in the Forestry Standards Manual).

2.7 Tree provenance, plant health and planting stock selection

Detailed standards and specifications for species selection under the Scheme are set down in the *Forestry Standards Manual*.

2.8 Stocking levels

Forests and plots must comply with the minimum stocking levels and spacing set down in the *Forestry Standards Manual*.

2.9 General Site Requirements

The DAFM *Land Types for Afforestation* document sets out the potential eligibility of land for support under the Afforestation Scheme.

Other, general site requirements for grant aid under the Scheme, including rules governing unplanted areas and setback distances, are set out in the *Environmental Requirements for Afforestation* and the *Forestry Standards Manual*.

2.10 Silvicultural Standards

The silvicultural standards required for grant aid under the Scheme are set out in the *Forestry Standards Manual*.

2.11 Mapping

Forest Service Mapping Standards are detailed in the *Forestry Standards Manual* and form part of the terms and conditions that apply to all maps submitted under this Scheme. They are contained in the *Forestry Standards Manual* which is available at:

gov.ie - Forestry Standards Manual (www.gov.ie)

Annex 3

Forests for Water

Introduction

The Forests for Water measure is an initiative from the DAFM designed to encourage farmers and other landowners to create Native Forests specifically for the purpose of protecting Ireland's inland water quality and the rich ecosystems services it supports.

Forest plots created under FT2 can attract a further payment of €1,000 / ha in addition to the 20 year farmer premium available, to be paid as a one-off lump sum at first premium post Form 2.

Forests for Water plots can comprise stand-alone projects or form part of a larger afforestation application involving different Forest Types (FTs). Areas under this measure will typically include riparian zones and fluvial floodplain sites, but other areas may also qualify, where Native Forest planting delivers on one or more of the water-related objectives (see below).

Forest plots entered for this measure must satisfy the FT rules and planting specifications set out under the relevant Native Forest Scenario[2]; and must also meet *at least one* of the following two objectives centred on protecting water quality and river morphology, flood risk management, and the restoration and expansion of wet woodland. DAFM will add 4 further layers/objectives will be added as they become available to DAFM.

All applications will be subject to assessment by DAFM and will undergo public consultation, referral to statutory consultees, screening for Appropriate Assessment, etc. As a new initiative undertaken as part of DAFM's commitment to achieving objectives under the Water Framework Directive and Habitats Directive, the Forests for Water measure will be kept under review, and details may change as experience is gained. Existing undisturbed wetlands, areas with a high water table or requiring drainage to be established and other habitats that are already delivering a high level of water protection are not eligible.

FORESTS FOR WATER OBJECTIVES

In addition to the biodiversity and climate regulation benefits of Native Forest creation, the planting of riparian and floodplain forests can help to reduce and/or intercept pollution, protect river morphology, moderate stream temperature and aid flood risk management, as well as meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets for the restoration and

[2] As set out in the Native Forest Framework, designed to aid Owners, Registered Foresters and Ecologists towards the most appropriate woodland type for a site or part of a site, and specifying the required planting mixture and design to 'start' that woodland. The current NF Framework includes a scenario of particular relevance to this Forests for Water measure; Scenario 6: Alluvial Floodplains (Wet Woodland). Note, it is not mandatory for plots entered under the Forests for Water measure to comprise Scenario 6 – the decision regarding which scenario to apply must be driven by an analysis of the site features, as set out in the NF Framework.

expansion of wet woodland. The Forests for Water measure supports the creation of Native Forests in key areas, through the provision of an additional top-up payment to the existing grant available FT2.

To be eligible for consideration under the Forests for Water measure, one or more of the following objectives (formulated to effectively target resources under this measure) must be satisfied, as demonstrated by the Applicant. The top-up payment will be paid on the entire plot area that achieves the objective:

Objective 1: Areas identified as Rank 1-3 on the EPA Pollution Impact Potential (PIP) Maps for phosphorus. Planting will be targeted at breaking the pathway and protecting the delivery points.

Areas eligible must be within an area considered as Rank 1 – 3 on the Phosphorus Pollution Impact Potential (PIP) Maps for phosphorus and have a *potential* flow delivery point to an aquatic zone, which is mapped as Medium, High or Very High. All relevant layers are available on iNET.

To identify these areas, follow these steps:

- Step 1: Turn on the EPA Waterbodies layer and the 1:10560 raster layer on iNET. For the purposes of all types of afforestation, an aquatic zone is defined as a classified EPA Waterbody or a stream shown on the above referenced 1:10560 raster layer in iNET with a flow direction arrow.
- Step 2. Is the area within a phosphorus PIP Rank 1 – 3 (Only areas ranked 1 – 3 are shown in iNET.)
- Step 3. If the application area falls within one of these areas, then assess if there is a pathway to an aquatic zone. Turn on the Phosphorus Delivery Flow Paths and Phosphorus Flow Delivery Points layers. The proposed plot must protect flow delivery points for phosphorus mapped as Medium, High or Very High. The flow delivery pathway should be broken by the planting.

  Note: The Pollution Impact Potential, Flow Delivery Paths and Flow Delivery Points layers point to a *potential* for phosphorus loss to water and do not imply that phosphorus *is* being lost to water at these points.

Only areas that meet both criteria, (i.e. breaking the pathway and protecting the delivery point), will be considered to meet Objective 1.

Objective 2: Expansion of the Habitats Directive Annex I Habitat: Alluvial Woodland 91EO

The Habitats Directive Annex I Habitat Alluvial Woodland 91EO is currently at Bad Overall Status in Ireland. These areas have been mapped by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and have been added to iNET. Appropriate applications that are contiguous and serve to extend this habitat will be eligible for the Forests for Water payment, subject to DAFM procedures including referral to statutory consultees and screening for Appropriate Assessment.

PROCEDURE FOR APPLYING UNDER THE FORESTS FOR WATER MEASURE

Applications are submitted using the normal afforestation application, plus the appended Forests for Water Application Form (F4WA).

The Top-up payment is claimed at Form 2.

Forest for Water Application Form

Forests for Water Measure Application Form	**(F4WA)**
A. Application Reference Number:	
B. Date:	
C. Plot Number(s) Claimed as F4W:	
D. Relevant Plot Area (Ha):	
E. Native Forest Scenario (1-6):	
F. Objective (i - vi) (Possible to select more than one) i. Phosphorus interception (Complete boxes G & H below) ii. Areas identified by LAWPRO or ASSAP iii. Drinking water source protection iv. Natural water retention measures v. Associated with Alluvial Woodlands (91E0) vi. Freshwater ecology/habitat with IFI	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
G. Does the area fall within a Pollution Impact Potential area for Phosphorus (Rank 1 -3)?	
H. Does the plot intercept an overland flow path and protect a phosphorus delivery point?	

Forest for Water Payment Form

Forests for Water Payment Form (Payment)	**(F4WP)**
A. Application Reference Number:	
B. Date:	
C. Plot Number(s):	
D. Plot Area (Ha) (Mapped):	
E. Native Forest Scenario (1-6):	
F. Objective (i - vi) (Possible to select more than one) i. Phosphorus interception (Complete boxes G & H below) ii. Areas identified by LAWPRO or ASSAP iii. Drinking water source protection iv. Natural water retention measures v. Associated with Alluvial Woodlands (91E0) vi. Freshwater ecology/habitat with IFI	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
G. Does the area fall within a Pollution Impact Potential area for Phosphorus (Rank 1 -3)?	
H. Does the plot intercept an overland flow path and protect a phosphorus delivery point?	

Annex 4 Penalties

As detailed in the Forestry Scheme Penalty Schedules (DAFM 2023).

Annex 5 Form 2 Management Plan

Components of the Management Plan

The following provides explanatory notes on the different components of the Form 2 Management Plan. The fields below will be developed into an online Management Plan system following the recommendations from the COFORD Forest Management Plan Working Group. The explanatory notes below refer to drop down menus in the proposed computer system but can be used in the interim in the complication of paper-based management plans at Form 2 stage.

See Form 2 extract on the following page.

'Forest Type'

The user is prompted by a drop-down menu and / or check box to select the most appropriate category to describe the plot. Only one forest type is allowed per plot / sub-compartment. The options are:

BHF	Broadleaf High Forest
CHF	Conifer High Forest
COP	Coppice Forest
MHF	Mixed High Forest
NON	Non-Forest Area

'Mgmt Obj'

This refers to the primary management objective for the plot. It can be different to the overall high level objective for the forest. The user is prompted by a drop-down menu to select one objective. The options are:

Biodiversity	Areas managed for biodiversity
Hunting	Includes areas managed for hunting and sporting leases
Landscape	Areas managed primarily for landscape purposes Protection Includes buffer areas around features (excludes water)
Recreation	Areas managed primarily for the provision of recreation
Riparian	Protection of water quality including riparian buffer zones
Timber	Primary purpose is production of saleable timber
Other	None of the above and the user can specify

FOREST MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVE

Forest Management Objective
☐ 1 Commercial timber production while adhering to principles of SFM ☐ 2 Provide commercial non timber benefits ☐ 3 Provide environmental benefits and services **Other:**

FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN DETAIL

Plot No.	Forest Type	Mgmt Obj	1st Act	Plan Yr	2nd Act	Plan Yr	First Thin	Rot Type	Fell Year	Timing	Road Status	Harvest Area (%)

'Plan Yr'

The user provides the year when an activity is planned to take place.

'1st Act' and '2nd Act'

A list of activities with associated heading (in red) follows:

- Aerial Fert *
- Drain Repairs
- Fence Repairs
- Fertilise
- Firelines
- Harvesting *
- Inventory
- None
- Other Paths
- Protection Pruning
- Road Constr *
- Road Upgrade
- Road Repairs
- Shaping

'First Thin'

This is the year when it is planned to undertake 1st thinning or, in the case of plots already thinned, the year in which the 1st thinning took place or is estimated to have taken place. The user is prompted to enter a year in the form of a 4-digit numeric value.

'Rot Type'

The user selects the rotation type from one of six options, as follows:

1. **'MMAI'** is the rotation of maximum mean annual increment and is equivalent to the rotation of maximum volume production.
2. '**Standard**' is the rotation age specified for different species by the Forestry Division in the late 1970s. It is the age of MMAI less 20% for Sitka spruce and Norway spruce, the age of MMAI less 30% for Lodgepole pine, and the age of MMAI for all other conifer species. These rotations are an approximation of the final rotation.
3. **'Reduced'** is a rotation less than standard (-2 years or more) and is usually prescribed due to concerns about crop stability.
4. **'Technical'** is a technical rotation which is normally prescribed in order to produce a standard product or tree size at the age of clearfell, e.g. rotation to produce an average trees size of 0.7 m^3 at clearfell.
5. **'Extended'** indicates an extended rotation (+4 years or more) over a standard rotation

This could be for a variety of reasons, including landscape, biodiversity or in order to await the felling of an adjoining or nearby area, to achieve economies-of-scale.

6. '**CCF'** indicates continuous forest cover and as such, it is not a rotation type. However, it classifies the plot / sub-compartment as being under a continuous thinning regime.

'Fell Year'

Once the user has selected the rotation type, they are prompted to enter a fell year.

'Timing'

This indicates at what time during the year the planned harvesting can take place. Due to a variety of site factors (such as soil type), some sites can only be thinned during summer months, while others can only be harvested at specific times during the year (summer or winter), due to restrictions regarding designated areas and protected species / habitats. The user should select the relevant timing of the harvesting from a drop-down menu. There are three options: 'Summer', 'Winter' and 'All Year'.

'Road Status'

This indicates whether there is adequate / sufficient roading to allow the harvesting to take place. There are two options on the drop-down menu:

1. 'Adequate' means that there is sufficient roading infrastructure for the planned harvesting to take place.
2. 'Inadequate' means that harvesting cannot proceed until: (i) the roading infrastructure has been upgraded to a sufficient standard (e.g. an existing track is upgraded to a road or a right-of-way); or (ii) a new road is constructed.

'Harvest Area (%)'

This is an estimate of the percentage of the plot area that will be subjected to harvesting. This can vary from 100% to as low as 50% for a number of reasons. The user is prompted to select a value from a drop-down menu within the range 50 to 100 in 5-point intervals.

Annex 6 Definitions

For the purposes of this Scheme:

- **'Applicant'** means a person who has applied for Approval under the Scheme or has planted woodland following an Approval under the Scheme;
- **'Approval**' means an Afforestation Scheme Technical Approval granted by the Minister;
- **'Application, Technical Approval'** means an application for the Minister's approval to establish a forest under the terms of all current legislation, guidelines and the conditions of this scheme.
- **'Application – 1st Instalment Grant'** means an application to receive a 1st instalment of an afforestation grant and 1st annual premium following the establishment of a forest within the terms of the Pre-planting approval.
- **'Application – Second Instalment Grant'** means an application to receive a 2nd instalment of an afforestation grant, which can be claimed for payment 4 years after the completion date of the forest establishment.
- **'Application - Annual Premium'** means an application which is to be submitted annually to the Forest Service to receive a subsequent premium.
- **'Appropriate Assessment"** means an assessment in accordance with the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011)
- **'Registered Forester'** means a qualified person named on the Register of Foresters and Forestry Companies, available from the Department.
- **'Completion Date'** means the date the afforestation works are completed.
- **'DAFM'** means the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- **'Department'** means the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- **'Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)'** means an assessment in accordance with the Forestry Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 191 of 2017), as amended.
- **'Farm**' or '**Holding'** means all the land parcel production units in the State (owned, leased or rented) that are under the control of the applicant.
- **'Farmer'** is defined as a person who carries out an agricultural activity such as 'the rearing or growing of agricultural products including harvesting, milking, breeding animals and keeping animal for farming purposes'.
- **'Forest'** is as defined in the Forestry Act, 2014, - "land under trees with (a) a minimum area of 0.1 ha, (b) tree crown cover of more than 20% of the total area, or the potential to achieve this cover at maturity".
- **'Forestry Environmental Guidelines'** means the following publications as amended from time to time: 'Forestry and Water Quality Guidelines'; 'Forestry and Landscape Guidelines'; 'Forestry and Archaeology Guidelines', 'Forest Biodiversity Guidelines'; 'Forest Harvesting and the Environment Guidelines'; 'Forestry and Aerial Fertilisation Guidelines'; 'Forestry and Forest Protection Guidelines'; 'Otter Guidelines' and 'Forestry and Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements'. The Minister may, from time to time, amend the guidelines or add further guidelines to this definition.
- **'Forest Service'** means the Forestry Division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- **'FT'** means Forest Type implying forest function and species planted.
- **'Immediate Family Member'** means Spouse, Parent, Brother, Sister, Son or Daughter.
- **'Joint Management Consent'** means consent submitted by the owner of specific lands consenting to the payment of grants and/or premiums to an immediate family member who jointly manages the forest.
- **'Lease'** means a term of years absolute in possession for at least the term of the Scheme from the commencement date of the contract under the Scheme.
- **'Minister'** means the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

- ‘**Municipality**’ is a single administrative division having corporate status and powers of self-government or jurisdiction as granted by national and regional laws to which it is subordinate.
- **‘Penalty Schedules’** means the schedules outlined and described in the “*Forestry Schemes Penalty Schedules*” document.
- **‘Plot’** means a discrete area of one species or a species mix with a forest.
- **‘Scheme’** means the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme 2023-2027.
- **‘Sustainable Forest Management’** means the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economical and social functions, at local, national and global levels and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems.

Annex 7 Form 1d

Afforestation Scheme – FT3 Forest Creation on Public Lands

FORM 1(d): Notice of Commencement of the Installation of Recreational Facilities

(Submit at least 6 weeks before installation works begin)

1.	**Establishment Scheme**	**Afforestation FT3**
2.	**Contract Number**	
3.	**FO Number**	
4.	**Name of: (please tick relevant option)** ☐ **Registered Owner** ☐ **Person entitled to be Registered as Owner** ☐ **Lessee**	
5.	**Address of: (please tick relevant option)** ☐ **Registered Owner** ☐ **Person entitled to be Registered as Owner** ☐ **Lessee**	
6.	**Email Address of: (please tick relevant option)** ☐ **Registered Owner** ☐ **Person entitled to be Registered as Owner** ☐ **Lessee**	
7.	**County and Townland where installation is proposed**	
8.	**Technical Approval for: (please tick relevant option(s)** ☐ **Element 1 Trails, Seating & Signage**	

	☐ **Element 2 Forest Playground**	
9.	**Please detail any changes to Form 1 approval**	
10.	**If any changes made to Form 1 Approval include revised map**	
11.	**Date of commencement of installation**	
12.	**Expected Completion Date of installation**	

Signed (on behalf of Applicant, representative of Public Body):

_____ **Date:** _____

Annex 8 NeighbourWood Plan

NeighbourWood Plan

TEMPLATE DOCUMENT: ***INSERT SPACES, AS NECESSARY***

Part A: Project Overview

1. Give the site location and the Applicant's name, as stated in the accompanying NeighbourWood Scheme Form 1.
2. Indicate the NeighbourWood Scheme element(s) being applied for (tick as relevant).

   NBR ESTABLISHMENT☐

   NBR FACILITIES☐
3. Give an overview of the proposed NeighbourWood project, including its overall aims, linkages with other projects / initiatives / amenities, incorporation into local plans, etc.
4. Is this NeighbourWood Scheme application (for a maximum of 12 ha in area) part of a wider woodland or outdoor amenity initiative / programme. If so, describe.
5. List the specific partners involved in the project (e.g. local authority, local resident groups, environmental NGOs, local schools, sporting bodies). Describe the role of each, both to date and in the future. Provide contact details for each.
6. Describe the level of contact and dialogue locally with other statutory bodies, such as the National Parks & Wildlife Service and Inland Fisheries Ireland. While the Forest Service will refer to such bodies as it deems necessary, local contact and dialogue in advance of submission will ensure a level of awareness regarding the project.
7. Who will be the likely users of the woodland? Describe the likely level of use.
8. Describe measures undertaken to involve local people (e.g. existing site users, adjoining residents, local families, local schools) in the development of the project to date.
9. Describe measures to involve local people in the future, as the project develops.
10. Who will be responsible for the long-term maintenance and development of the project, and what measures are being put in place to underpin this?

Part B: Site Details

1. Describe the location of the site, particularly in relation to nearby centres of population.
2. What is the area, in hectares, of the overall site?
3. What is the ownership status of the site? (Please note, if privately owned, the Applicant must provide a declaration that the amenity will be maintained and access provided for a period of 6 years after the completion date of all works.)
4. What is the overall site currently being used for?
5. Give a general overview of the existing features on the site, illustrating these on a NeighbourWood Plan Map. Existing features include:
   - existing walking routes (forest roads, footpaths, unofficial tracks)
   - other existing recreational facilities (car parking, picnic sites, seating, etc.)
   - existing habitats (*)
   - archaeological features, earthworks, old stonewalls, etc. (Note that full adherence to the Forest Service *Forestry & Archaeological Guidelines* and to any special conditions attached to the Letter of Approval, is required in relation to archaeological features on and adjoining the site.)
   - other historical or cultural features
   - prominent viewpoints.

   (* Existing habitats should be mapped using the 2nd level classification codes listed in pages 14-15 of the Heritage Council's *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000; available at www.heritagecouncil.ie). E.g. **GA2** Amenity grassland (improved); **BL1** Stone walls and other stonework; **WD2** Mixed broadleaved/conifer woodland; **FW2** Depositing/lowland rivers.)

6. Describe any threats that, unless addressed, may have a negative impact on project development (e.g. vandalism, horse trespass, invasive species, over-mature canopy, fire, persistent dumping). Note that these factors will have to be addressed in subsequent sections of the plan.

Part C: Project Objectives

1. What is the medium to long term vision for the site over the next 20 years?
2. What are the short-term objectives to be achieved before the application for grant payment. Note that grant payment will depend on these objectives being met. Specific details are required, for example:

   "To clear laurel from 3.0 ha concentrated in the northwest of the site."

   "To develop a short way-marked looped walking trail 750 m long, together with a welcoming sign at two entrance points and seating at six vantage points on the site."

"To establish 4.0 ha of new amenity woodland, comprising oak, ash, rowan and silver birch."

Part D: NeighbourWood ESTABLISHMENT

1. How much of the overall site, in hectares, is being submitted under NBR Establishment? Note that this area must correspond with the area for this element submitted on the Form 1 and illustrated on the Certified Species Map.
2. Describe and cost proposed operations to be completed before the submission for grant payment. *Note that specific details are required, e.g. species to be planted, planting ratios, protective measures.*
3. Using a map, illustrate within the NBR Establishment area the actual 'footprint' of the proposed planting and the proposed open spaces. (Up to 30% of the NBR Establishment area is allowed as integrated open space.) Also illustrate the position of protective fencing (if used) and other relevant operations.
4. Using a yearly schedule, describe the operations to be completed under this element within the 6 year contract period of the overall NeighbourWood Scheme project.
5. In general terms, describe operations envisaged up to year 20 within the NBR Establishment area.

Part E: NeighbourWood FACILITIES (complete if necessary)

1. How much of the site, in hectares, is being submitted for funding under NBR FACILITIES? Note that this area must correspond with the area for this element submitted on the Form 1 and illustrated on the Certified Species Map.
2. Describe and cost the proposed facilities to be installed / upgraded before the submission for grant payment (i.e. Form 2). Include clear specification for each type (including diagrams, plans and photos), the number of units and the unit cost (including materials and installation).
3. Using a map, illustrate within the NBR FACILITIES area the proposed position of each facility (e.g. footpaths, seats, picnic tables, signs, car parking).
4. Using a yearly schedule, describe the ongoing maintenance and replacement envisaged regarding these facilities within the 6 year contract period of the overall NeighbourWood Scheme project.

Part F: NeighbourWood Scheme Criteria

As set out in the NeighbourWood Scheme document, the evaluation of applications involves scoring based on set criteria that best capture the aims and objectives of the scheme. Seven criteria apply, each with an equal weighting of 10 points. Only those applications that achieve a minimum of 45 points out of a maximum score of 70 will be eligible for approval, subject to suitability and the availability of funds.

In this section of the NeighbourWood Plan, Applicants are required to demonstrate how the application meets these criteria. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to describe any relevant details that relate to each criterion and to provide any relevant supporting documentation (e.g. visitor surveys, letters of support, minutes of meetings with community groups). Otherwise, points cannot be awarded

Criterion 1: The extent to which the site is already used – or has the potential to be used – by the local community on a 'free-to-enter' basis, for non-specialised outdoor / woodland recreation (e.g. walking, jogging, family picnics).

Indicators include the level of existing use, the active presence of a local community group seeking recreational development, the proximity to an population centre, existing attributes of the site lending itself to recreational development (e.g. attractive mixed woodland, features, views), the level of immediate (onsite or immediately adjacent) access to other wider walking routes or cycle ways, and / or with an existing attraction onsite which itself draws significant visitor numbers.

Criterion 2: Extent and level of partnership underpinning the application, relating to the local authority, the local community, specific user groups (including people with particular needs), particular interest groups (e.g. local historical societies, birdwatchers), local schools, local businesses, local development enterprises, etc.

Criterion 3: The level of focus on the provision of a high quality and varied experience for users of all ages and abilities, through the installation of appropriate facilities.

Indicators include the appropriate layout and design of facilities, including pathways, signage, information boards, the level of balance reached between the carrying capacity of the woodland and the layout and density of pathways, the layout of pathways to provide looped walks and to lead visitors to key woodland features.

Criterion 4: The level of focus on the provision of environmental education and outdoor interpretation of the woodland habitat, and habitats in general, and also the wider heritage associated with Ireland's woodlands and forests - natural, historical and cultural.

Indicators will include the nature of facilities being proposed (e.g. nature trail, specialised signage), existing or proposed linkage with local schools, the diversity of the woodland.

Criterion 5: The level of focus on identifying potential issues regarding (e.g.) security, dumping, vandalism, fire, and on formulating proposed integrated and sustainable solutions to tackle these.

Criterion 6: The level of integration into the local infrastructure. Indicators include inclusion with local development plans and tourist leaflets, road signage, good quality approach roads and / or footpaths, integration into local transport.

Criterion 7: The long-term future sustainability of the project, for example, integration into local authority budgets, evidence of linkage into long-term plans (County Council Development Plan, Biodiversity Plan, ‘Green’ Plan, Tourism Plan, Recreational Strategy).

Part H: Declaration
We, the undersigned, declare that we have jointly prepared this NeighbourWood Plan as part of the application for this site under the Forest Service NeighbourWood Scheme, following a detailed site assessment and consultation with project partners, and in accordance with the terms and condition of the scheme, and that all information is accurate and correct to the best of our knowledge. Applicant Signature _____ Date _____ Registered Forester Signature _____ Date _____

An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine