

## CM2: Establishing trees and new woodland to improve water quality

This nature-based project option will revert whole or part fields from arable (including maize growing) or intensive grassland to create new broadleaf woodland in blocks (catchment woodland) or alongside water courses (riparian woodland). It may also be used as an edge-of-field or in-field cross-slope wooded buffer strip. This latter option should be used for fields or areas of fields that regularly flood, are prone to waterlogging or which experience or intercept surface runoff and soil erosion.

The three main types of woodland eligible for funding within this option are:

1. Wider catchment woodland (minimum 0.5 Ha planting blocks)- planting can help reduce fertiliser and pesticide usage; protect sensitive soils from disturbance and erosion; increase infiltration and reduce water runoff; and intercept sediment and chemical pollutants in run-off, reducing the delivery of pollutants to watercourses.
2. Riparian woodland (minimum 10m wide strips)- planting along watercourses can create a buffer between rivers and the adjacent land, intercepting and removing nutrient pollutants and sediment in run-off; providing a barrier to pesticide spray drift; protecting riverbanks from disturbance and erosion; slowing flood flows; and providing shade to reduce thermal stress to fish and other aquatic life.
3. Cross-slope woodland (minimum 20m wide planting strips)- planting of smaller areas (typically belts) of woodland across hill slopes. Cross-slope woodlands can intercept pollutants and reduce rapid runoff from higher land. They can also encourage infiltration and increase the soil's water storage capacity.

The choice of species to be planted will depend on local conditions, with the aim of having the right tree in the right place, and must include a minimum of 80% native species. The minimum density of woodland planting required to be considered permanent land use change is 20% canopy cover at maturity, this has been translated for this specification as a minimum requirement of 400 trees per hectare for catchment woodland and riparian woodland options.

Planting densities of 600 trees per hectare are needed for cross-slope woodland. Higher planting densities can be used and would be required (minimum 1100 stems per hectare for broadleaved woodland) if additional grant support from England's Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) was also being sought.

Even higher planting densities would also be acceptable, for instance if the intention was to create Carbon Credits for sale. However, in order to sell Woodland Carbon Credits, potential project suppliers would need to account for the income achieved from the sale of the project on the Somerset Catchment Market when testing whether the additionality requirements of the Woodland Carbon Code were met.

Creating new woodland causes a permanent land use to change so that it is no longer classified as agricultural land. Planted woodland requires management for the first ten to fifteen years after

establishment, in terms of gap plugging, fencing and maintenance until the canopy has reached above browsing height. Thereafter, management is relatively minimal. Throughout the lifetime of woodlands funded via the Somerset Catchment Market, it is permissible for the landowner to generate additional income from the sale of thinning and timber products, providing the requirements of the management plan and appropriate Forestry and Environmental Impact legislation are met.

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## Length of Nature-based Project Agreement available

Nature-based Project Agreements will be offered for permanent land-use change to woodland, supported by annual land use payments for a minimum of 80 years, with active maintenance required (supported by additional annual payments) for 10 years after planting is complete.

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## Where to use this option

- Only in areas identified as low risk for woodland creation, as identified in the [Forestry Commission map browser](#) Layer: Data > Targeting and scoring > Low Risk Areas for Woodland Creation
- The most suitable locations within this constraint are those which have been used for arable, maize, or intensive grassland e.g., dairy enterprises for the past 3 or more years
- On land where planting blocks can be at least 0.5 hectares (1.25 acres) in area and at least 20 metres wide, unless in riparian zones where the minimum width is 10m.

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## Where this option cannot be used

- Not in areas outside the Low Risk for Woodland Creation map. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes:
  - Areas of existing woodland, or land that has been woodland in the past 10 years.
  - Not within 8m of a main water course where it is deemed inappropriate by the Environment Agency and not where it would pose an access barrier to flood risk management.
  - Not on a site where woodland planting and management is currently supported by a grant.
- Not in conjunction with pheasant/game bird pens.
- Not on sites is currently in receipt of any other public or private sector grant funding, other than the Basic Payment Scheme
  - However, application for new England Woodland Creation or Planning grants can also be made. Many of the Additional Contribution elements could also be claimed (including for riparian buffers), with the exception being the Water Quality element.

In some circumstances, woodland creation in low risk areas can still have a negative impact local heritage, environment, or access features. Avoiding these impacts is covered in the requirements for Environmental Impact Assessment outlined below.

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## Requirements

Establish woodland plots according to a [Woodland Creation Design Plan](#) then maintain these plots to ensure a healthy tree canopy is established within ten years of planting.

The complete woodland creation planning process, from undertaking the woodland design, to securing any necessary consents (including Environmental Impact Assessment notifications), and securing any additional public grant funding to plant, usually takes between six and 18 months, but may be longer.

In addition to any funds secured in the Somerset Catchment Market, you can also apply to the Forestry Commission for a [grant payment to fund preparation of a Woodland Creation Design Plan](#). If you wish to use this option, work on your creation plan should not commence until you have confirmation of that grant being awarded.

### Planting:

Planting should be carried out in line with the Woodland Creation Design Plan, between October and March. Planting density should be at least 400 stems per hectare for catchment and riparian woodland, or 600 stems per hectare for cross slope woodland. Planting blocks should be at least 20m wide, or 10m for riparian woodland.

### Maintenance:

Where possible, the [guidance on establishing and maintaining farm woodland](#), produced by the National Forest Company, should be followed. As a minimum:

- Replace stems that fail to establish in the following planting season to maintain the minimum planting density (and close any gaps in riparian or cross slope planting) throughout the first ten years of the agreement.
- Protect newly planted woodlands from weeds for three years. Cut or spot-spray any undesirable plants, such as nettles, bracken, injurious weeds, or invasive non-native species as soon as possible to avoid them becoming established
- Maintain grass understorey, keeping clear of competitive weeds until the trees are established.
- Consider coppicing trees if suitable as this will encourage bushy growth and increase the ability to slow run-off
- Remove individual guards and tree shelters once the plants are established, usually from 5 years onwards.

### Restrictions:

- Do not apply any organic manures or inorganic fertilisers
- Do not use pesticides, except for herbicides to spot-treat or weed-wipe to control nettles, bracken, injurious weeds, or invasive non-native species
- Do not allow pesticides and fertiliser to drift into the wooded area
- Do not plough, cultivate or re-seed between trees
- Do not attach fencing wire to trees or hedgerows
- Do not block or restrict access to open access land
- Do not allow livestock access to the woodland or use for the purpose of rearing game birds.
- Do not cut down or remove any trees without a felling license, and without following the terms of the Nature-based Project Agreement regarding felling and restocking
- Do not cultivate within 3m of the base of any trees

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### Keeping records and payment terms

Suppliers of woodland projects will enter a Nature-based Project Agreement with the buying organisation. This will govern the obligations on both parties, including the duration of the agreement and the records that must be kept.

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them with the payment claim:

- Photographs of the plots before trees are planted.
- Photographs of the trees once planted
- Invoices showing the trees purchased and evidence that the trees planted are UK sourced and grown
- Soil analysis results (pH, P and K as a minimum) for the relevant fields dated within the past 3 years
- Farm and field information needed to run a diffuse nutrient loss tool for the farm and calculate the reduction in nutrient loss to water arising from this work. This will include farm data relating to livestock numbers, crop areas and fertiliser and manure inputs.
- Successful applicants are required to sign a declaration confirming that:
  - a. reasonable precautions are taken to prevent nutrients and soil getting into watercourses or from being leached to groundwater to an extent that could cause pollution. And,
  - b. the relevant fields have not been (i) the source of a recorded pollution incident which could have been prevented by taking reasonable precautions to prevent that pollution and or (ii) the subject of a warning, fine, prosecution or BPS deduction issued by the Environment Agency or RPA for a breach of NVZ rules or Farming Rules for Water in the past 5 years.

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request throughout the duration of the Nature-based Project Agreement:

- Details of any woodland management and maintenance operations, including associated invoices

- Self-declaration that the terms of the Nature-based Project Agreement have been adhered to.
- Successful applicants are required to sign a declaration confirming that reasonable steps have been taken to prevent manure, fertiliser and soil from the field getting into watercourses.

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## Consents, licenses, and wider requirements

You can make bids to supply woodland before you have completed your Woodland Creation Design Plan or completed your Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). However, it will be a condition of your Nature-based Project Agreement that such plans and consents are in place to qualify for payments beyond the additional enabling payment.

Because the Market is seeking woodland creation projects that are only in low-risk woodland creation areas, a full EIA is unlikely to be required, unless the proposed project is above 50 Ha in size. For woodlands up to 5 Ha only a Basic Notification EIA is required, whilst woodlands of 5-50 Ha size will require a Full Notification. In both cases the presumption is that there is unlikely to be an adverse effect. The [Application Form](#) for these types of EIA sets out the information requirements.

Once woodland establishes, typically within 10 years of planting, trees will become large enough to require a Forestry Commission Felling Licence to be granted before any removal of trees occurs, this licence will specify any restocking requirements.

As noted at several points in this specification, it is possible to apply for public grants to support woodland creation in addition to any income from the Somerset Catchment Market. These grants will come with their own separate conditions and wider requirements that you must comply with.

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## Advice on tree planting and woodland management

- Checklist for preparing a woodland creation project: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forestry-project-checks-all-projects>
- Checking for constraints on woodland planting: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forestry-project-checks-constraints>
- Woodland creation planning grant and guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/woodland-creation-planning-grant>
- Environmental Impact Assessment requirements: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/environmental-impact-assessments-for-woodland#threshold-tables>
- UK Forestry Standard: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-forestry-standard>
- Woodland Trust Tree planting advice: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/advice/>
- Wet woodland guide: <https://assets.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/wet-woodlands.pdf>
- England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) grant manual: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1019929/EWCO\\_Grant\\_Manual\\_v2.0\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1019929/EWCO_Grant_Manual_v2.0_.pdf)

- Create a farm woodland: A toolkit to help you plan and plant (Huw Williams, National Forest Company)  
[https://www.cityoftrees.org.uk/sites/default/files/How%20to%20create%20a%20farm%20woodland\\_0.pdf](https://www.cityoftrees.org.uk/sites/default/files/How%20to%20create%20a%20farm%20woodland_0.pdf)



Planted willows along a drainage ditch  
*Photo credit © Robin Webster (cc-by-sa/2.0)*



Cross-slope woodland planting

*Photo credit: FWAG-SW*