####

**Forestry and Woodland Strategies Standing Advice for Planning Authorities**

October 2024

## Forestry and Woodland Strategies Standing Advice for Planning Authorities

## Context for this Standing Advice

This planning standing advice from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) applies primarily to Forestry and Woodland Strategies (FWS). It could also provide useful information for LDP topic papers and strategies covering forestry and woodland and blue green infrastructure. We do not require to be consulted on FWS’s and consultation requests for FWS’s will be directed to this guidance.

The standing advice sets out the key environmental issues we consider should be covered in a FWS.

# Spatial Guidance

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) policy 6, Forestry, woodland and trees sets out the national planning policy direction for forestry and woodlands. It aims to protect and expand forests, woodland, and trees. It recognises the important role local development plan spatial strategies play in expanding a range of woodland types to provide multiple benefits and support nature networks.

Maps identifying the following should be included in the FWS:

* Existing woodland to be protected including river woods.
* Opportunities to link existing woodland habitat fragments, restore and extend degraded woodland including riparian woodlands.
* Opportunities for the creation of new woodlands (other relevant plans & audits can help inform this).
* Areas where new planting is not suitable and other habitat such as peatland and wetlands are priority, or due to other ecological factors, for example there is already valuable tree or shrub habitat, such as pollinating plants, thickets and old orchards.

Online interactive maps can be a useful way of presenting the above. Online spatial mapping tools are useful tools to guide woodland expansion and monitor the implementation of the strategy. The mapping will help identify preferred and potential opportunities for new tree planting as well as those areas which are unsuitable or have sensitivities.

# Infrastructure first approach

NPF4 supports an infrastructure first approach by frontloading infrastructure considerations into the preparation of the LDP this includes blue and green infrastructure. The FWS will help identify existing woodland, where protection and restoration are required, gaps in the network, and opportunities to address gaps and create new woodland. Building this knowledge into the LDP spatial strategy at the outset helps to create sustainable, liveable, productive places.

The Evidence Report should be informed by an up-to-date FWS. The FWS should both reflect and inform other relevant assessments and audits such as the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) for the area and the blue and green infrastructure audit. Read our [Guidance for planning authorities on Strategic Flood Risk Assessment](https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/3psdfwce/sfra-guidance-for-planning-authorities.pdf) for further information

# Key environmental issues for consideration

Appropriate forestry and woodland planting can provide many benefits from carbon sequestration, improved air and water quality to promotion of physical and mental wellbeing.

Given the multiple benefits that woodlands and trees can provide the strategy should recognise the close policy links to climate, biodiversity, soils, blue and green infrastructure and flood risk and water management policies.

**Climate adaptation**

Well managed forests and woodlands can play an important role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. They mitigate the impact of climate change through carbon sequestration and by acting as a carbon store. They can also help us to adapt to climate change as part of natural flood risk management strategies and help regulate temperature through shading.

[Adaptation Scotland’s Climate Ready Places project](https://www.adaptationscotland.org.uk/climatereadyplaces) shows possible adaptation for typical Scottish places.

**Blue Green Infrastructure**

NPF4 recognises that woodland expansion in urban areas could contribute to improving air quality, managing water, and cooling urban environments. The policy intent of NPF4 policy 20 is to protect and enhance blue and green infrastructure and their networks. Relevant strategies and audits such as FWS’s should inform the LDP spatial strategy and design of development proposals to ensure multi-functional blue green infrastructure is designed into proposals.

Multi-functional blue and green infrastructure can be delivered at different scale, from landscape to street scale.

[Climate Ready Craigleith](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/6c5e4815a3f54ce5be4d6f99b0dff213?item=1) is an example of partnership working to find ways to solve local flooding issues including nature-based solutions such as tree planting. Trees have been introduced to streets and school grounds to manage water and reduce heat islands.

**Natural Flood Risk Management**

Appropriate planting of woodlands can help reduce and slow down flood waters. It works best when used with other flood risk management approaches. There are several ways that trees can have the potential to reduce flooding including increasing evaporation, and soil water storage reducing run-off. Riparian woodland can play a role in reducing sediment by protecting soils and river banks, helping to maintain watercourse capacity and reduce flooding.

Natural flood management measures can also provide additional benefits such as improved water quality, carbon sequestration and storage, habitat creation, reduced soil erosion. Local flood risk management strategies will help identify areas where woodland planting could reduce runoff. Flood risk management strategies will also highlight where there is potential for negative impacts if planting is undertaken where not appropriate, for example on areas of priority bog habitat.

Section 2.2 of [SEPA’s Natural Flood Management Handbook](https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/163560/sepa-natural-flood-management-handbook1.pdf) provides advice in relation to woodland creation and flood management.

**Soils**

Trees and woodlands can help to protect soil quality through their roots holding soil together, improving soil stability and in turn reducing runoff and increasing infiltration. Fallen leaf litter also creates new organic matter in the soil and over time increases the soil carbon content.

However planting trees on peat should be avoided as this can have an adverse impact on the existing ecology of the peat ecosystem and will generally result in a net loss of stored carbon. It should be noted that the UKFS Guidelines have a presumption against the conversion of priority habitats such as deep peat or active raised bogs for climate change reasons.

**Air Quality**

Planting the right tree in the right place can have benefits for air quality. They can reduce particulate matter through dispersion and deposition. Dispersion breaks up particulate matter, allowing the wind to redistribute particulate matter over a wider area. The leaf surface of trees can also remove particulate matter - this process is known as deposition. At a local level dispersion of pollutants is of most benefit to helping reduce exposure to air pollution. Urban tree planting as part of wider blue green infrastructure will have the additional benefit of encouraging more sustainable travel modes, helping to reduce emissions at source. The Greater London Authority has produced a useful best practice guide, “[Using Green Infrastructure to Protect People from Air Pollution | London City Hall](https://www.london.gov.uk/WHAT-WE-DO/environment/environment-publications/using-green-infrastructure-protect-people-air-pollution)”, on how green infrastructure can reduce exposure to air pollution. It gives guidance on the most appropriate type of planting for different situations and examples of where the effect of tree planting is uncertain.

**RBMP and River Restoration**

River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) set out a framework for protecting and improving the benefits provided by the water environment across Scotland. RBMP takes a spatial approach to identifying areas where a range of environmental benefits can be achieved. It recognises the multiple benefits of riparian tree planting and natural regeneration of riparian woodland which can help achieve RBMP objectives. [The RBMP for Scotland 2021-2027](https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/594088/211222-final-rbmp3-scotland.pdf) lists potential river restoration projects by local authority area including local authorities covered by the RBMP for the Solway Tweed River Basin District.

[The Water Environment Fund (WEF)](https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/water-environment-fund/) is administered by SEPA on behalf of the Scottish Government. WEF funding can help enable partnership working to restore damaged urban rivers. It does this by helping fund removal of old fish barriers, softening of hard bank protection, re-meandering of waterways. The restoration projects aim to provide a range of benefits for local communities from containing flood waters to creating new active travel routes. The projects can often provide opportunities for riparian tree planting or create new green space for tree planting. The Levern Water restoration project, part funded by the WEF, is an example of where the re-naturalisation of the river improved the ecological status of the river and acted as a catalyst for the wider regeneration of the area creating an opportunity for planting 600 trees.

[**Riverwoods Initiative**](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5eef590832aa486b86c78cb9d2d2d71f)

The Scottish Biodiversity strategy recognises riparian woodland as a key ecological component of restored rivers and wetlands. Riparian planting plays a key role in supporting healthy river systems; carbon and nutrient recycling, regulating the flow of water, increasing shading of water and protecting temperature sensitive species, whilst providing multiple health and recreational benefits are some of the positive environmental outcomes.

Visit the [Home | Riverwoods](https://www.riverwoods.org.uk/) website and the [Science Group | Riverwoods](https://www.riverwoods.org.uk/groups/science-group/) Science Evidence Review for a summary of the nature positive outcomes provided by riparian woodland. Browse the [UK Forestry Standard Practice Guide: Creating and managing riparian woodland](https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2024/07/UKFSPG028_Riparian-woodland_web-compressed-2.pdf) for more about the benefits of riparian woodland.

The Riverwoods initiative’s aim is to create a network of riverbank woodlands and healthy river systems across Scotland. The Scottish Wildlife Trust are the lead partner and SEPA are one of many delivery partners.

[The Riverwoods Data Hub](https://riverwoods-swt.hub.arcgis.com/) contains data on a range of topics and also links to external data sites.

There are several mapping tools which have been developed to help identify riparian planting opportunities. SEPA have produced a GIS layer which maps areas along watercourses where it has been identified riparian planting opportunities exist and would be highly beneficial. This layer could be used at a strategic scale to identify where woodland, could be beneficial to the water environment within a catchment. Where these do exist, they have been classified in terms of high/medium/low priority. It is available to download from [Environmental data | Scottish Environment Protection Agency](https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/environmental-data/) (SEPA) and is called the “Riparian Vegetation Planting Opportunities” data set.

[Rivertool](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f49964c9d7344ac4a6056cbde3122946) (Riparian Vegetation Ecosystem Services – based Ranking Tool) is an interactive online tool that helps identify suitable areas for riparian woodland creation.

If you would like this document in an accessible format, such as large print, audio recording or braille, please contact SEPA by emailing equalities@sepa.org.uk