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Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

NeighbourWood Scheme

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1. Introduction

The overall objective of the NeighbourWood Scheme is to develop attractive, easily-accessible local woodlands for the recreational use and enjoyment by communities in both urban and rural parts of Ireland. Such woodlands will cater for a range of recreational uses and pursuits, but ultimately, will create opportunities for people to experience the natural world, to take exercise, and to enjoy the company of family and friends in a relaxed natural setting, all of which have been shown to increase mental and physical health and wellbeing and to contribute to a better quality of life.

The NeighbourWood Scheme provides support for (i) silvicultural works designed to enhance existing forests and to increase their functionality and attractiveness for recreation; and (ii) the installation of suitable recreational facilities, including familiar features such as trails, seats, signs and parking to cater for all users, to more specialised facilities to cater for particular user groups, such as hides for birdwatching.

The Scheme can be applied for in relation to a wide range of recreational forest types, e.g. close-to-home 'neighbourwoods' used by local people on a daily basis. The Scheme can also be used to strengthen the role of a forest as a focus for outdoor fitness training or forest classroom educational programmes, or as a setting for an important heritage or cultural feature, or as part of a wider amenity development / network, such as 'green ways' or National Waymarked Trails.

This Scheme is aimed primarily at publicly-owned woodlands, but woodlands under community ownership or management trusts are eligible, as are private forests. However, certain criteria must be met in all cases, for a project to be eligible under this Scheme. Specifically, all applications must demonstrate a recreational need, clear user group(s), the accessibility and suitability of the forest for recreational development, and a partnership between the owner and the user(s) in developing the application and implementing the project (if approved).

Applicants can apply under one or both elements of the Scheme, which are described as follows:

Element 1: Enhancement

This element provides support for silvicultural works designed to enhance existing forests and to increase their attractiveness, biodiversity and suitability for recreation. Potential operations include the removal of invasive species, coupe planting to re-invigorate stagnant canopies, and the replacement of existing conifer stands with native woodland. Further information on Element 1 eligible operations can be found in Section 7 below.

Under Element 1, projects can receive up to €6,000 / ha in funding, based on approved costs and subject to an upper limit of €72,000 (i.e. €6,000 x 12 ha).

Element 2: Facilities

This element provides funding for suitable facilities that enable the use and enjoyment of existing woodlands and forests by people. These facilities can range from general features such as trails, seats, signs and parking to cater for the general user, to more specialised facilities for particular user groups. Further information on what is eligible under Element 2 can be found in Section 7 below.

Under Element 2, projects can receive up to €4,200 / ha, based on approved works and subject to an upper limit of €50,400 (i.e. €4,200 x 12 ha). It is aimed at existing woodlands, including woodlands that been recently planted.

While an overall initiative involving the recreational development of a woodland may be larger, the maximum payable area per application under the NeighbourWood Scheme is capped at 12 ha. Regarding this 12 ha limit, the following are scenarios that might arise:

- Project A comprising 12 ha under Element 1, 12 ha under Element 2, with both components involving the same physical footprint.
- Project B comprising 12 ha under Element 1, and 4 ha of Element 2, with the latter component situated wholly within the footprint of the former. (Note, for application purposes, in this (or similar) situation(s), the Registered Forester must digitise two separate plots (summing to 12 ha), i.e. one (4 ha) plot for Element 1 and 2, and another (8 ha) plot for Element 1 only.)
- Project C comprising 8 ha of Element 1 and 4 ha of Element 2, with both components involving different, non-overlapping parts of the same recreational forest.

In addition to the grants detailed above, private applicants under this Scheme may be eligible for an annual Payment for Ecosystem Service (PES). This acknowledges the forest environmental and climate services provided by the forest owner's adoption and management of alternative silvicultural and recreational systems, and the associated additional costs incurred in doing so. Specifically, PES 5 ('People') applies, set at €90 / ha for 7 years.

Note that the establishment of new forests designed for recreational use (e.g. to expand an existing forest or to create a new forest resource where previously none existed) is funded by the Afforestation Scheme under 'Forest Type' FT4. This also includes a provision for the parallel installation of recreation facilities. See Section 6 for details.

All forests entered under the NeighbourWood Scheme must be managed in accordance with the principles of Sustainable Forest Management.

Applicants under the NeighbourWood Scheme 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. Applicants have a responsibility to ensure that forests are maintained according to the rules of the Scheme throughout the period of the contract. The management and maintenance of the woodland is a condition of continued payment of aid under the Scheme.

The NeighbourWood Scheme is open to all private and public landowners in Ireland. The Department will assess applications under the Scheme to ensure a geographical spread and to avoid a disproportionate uptake between private and public forest owners and between different public bodies.

This document should be read in conjunction with the following documents issued by the Department:

- *Forestry Standards Manual*
- *Standards for Felling & Reforestation*
- *Felling & Reforestation Policy*
- any Circular(s) periodically issued by the Department
- *Forestry Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners & Managers* (2006).

The documents listed above (including Circulars) can be downloaded from www.gov.ie/forestry

2. General Outline and Legal Basis

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

- The Scheme is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and operates throughout the State. The Scheme shall be operational from 12/03/2025 for a period to be determined by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- The Scheme is 100% Exchequer funded under the following legal framework.
 - The Scheme is operated pursuant to the European Union guidelines for State aid in the agriculture and forestry sector and in rural areas.
 - 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.
- Participation in the NeighbourWood Scheme is voluntary.
- All applications submitted under the NeighbourWood Scheme must obtain prior written approval from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, before any operations commence.
- Projects where works applied for are undertaken without prior approval will not be eligible for funding under this Scheme.

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 NeighbourWood Scheme application form on iNET 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 Department 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 Department.

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

The overall objective of the NeighbourWood Scheme is to increase the suitability of Ireland's woodlands and forests for recreational use, by supporting the silvicultural enhancement of existing woodlands and forests and the introduction of appropriate recreational facilities.

In doing so, the NeighbourWood Scheme will result in the following.

- New or improved semi-natural settings for use by local communities and others, delivering associated health benefits for the general public.
- Investment in appropriate facilities that encourage a greater level of direct engagement with the forest setting.
- Investment in promoting the awareness of woodland ecosystems and the rich and diverse natural, cultural and historical heritage associated with these places.
- Support for actions aimed at protecting and enhancing forests and forest ecosystems located close to centres of population.
- Support for actions aimed at protecting and enhancing forests and forest ecosystems in rural areas, where a demand for local use is identified.
- Increased opportunities for local people to become involved in their local environment, for the betterment of the surrounding community, both urban and rural.
- Increased awareness amongst users regarding their own responsibility towards how they use woodlands and forests, in line with established 'Leave No Trace' principles.

5. Scheme Benefits

The following are just some of the benefits that can be delivered by projects funded under the NeighbourWood Scheme:

- Woodlands support a wide range of recreational pursuits and interests, from simple evening strolls to birdwatching and other pursuits and interests to 'high-octane' sports such as orienteering and mountain-biking. Whatever the activity, amenity woodlands provide a location for people to have fun and to enjoy themselves, alone or in the company of others.
- By engaging all our senses, amenity woodlands provide direct contact with the natural world throughout the changing seasons, allowing us the space and environment for relaxation and rejuvenation.
- Amenity woodlands promote physical and mental health, restore calmness, and promote a sense of well-being. Such benefits are well established and serve to enrich the lives of individuals and their wider community.
- Amenity woodlands can be used as 'outdoor classrooms' by local schools or other educational groups, with applications across the syllabus.
- Amenity woodlands provide the perfect window for people to learn about our heritage – natural, historical, and cultural. Through interpretative facilities and methods, visitors can learn about the woodland's complex ecosystem or its connection to the area's history. This enhances the area's sense of place and creates the basis for understanding and appreciating the wider environment, and threats to it.
- Amenity woodlands provide a fantastic medium for the local community to engage positively in influencing its surrounding environment. Local participation in design and managing realises a volunteer 'workforce' to help with (e.g.) aspects of maintenance, helps to ensure the woodland is tailored to local needs and preferences, and can lead to community activism in other areas. All of these increase the sense of place and community pride.
- Amenity woodlands provide a refuge for wildlife, not only in terms of the woodland ecosystem itself and all of the associated flora and fauna, but also in terms of the wider locality within which the woodland sits. This is particularly apparent in urban areas, where the natural world has to live alongside the hustle and bustle of urban life – in such areas, the woodland will act as a refuge for wildlife. But amenity woodlands in the rural context are of equal importance, and are more likely to have a higher degree of naturalness and diversity in terms of flora and fauna. For example, amenity woodlands in the rural setting will most likely support a greater range of lichens, due to the lack of pollution in the air.
- Amenity woodlands also have financial value. While direct income from timber is often limited, other monetary values exist. By adding 'green' value to the locality as somewhere for people to live, work and play, amenity woodlands attract inward investment and employment into the area. They attract visitors from further afield, especially where they link into the local 'greenway' or the National Trails Network. While the charging of entry fees is not permitted under this Scheme, fees can apply where particular user groups are involved, to stage events within the woodland.

As outlined above, the development of amenity woodlands and their subsequent use by local people and specific user groups deliver wide ranging social, environmental and economic benefits directly to the general public.

This forms the basis for the provision of support for such woodlands under the current Forestry Programme 2023-2027, in the form of the NeighbourWood Scheme.

6. Key requirements of the NeighbourWood Scheme

The following describes various key requirements that apply under the NeighbourWood Scheme. These are reflected in the various questions to be addressed in the NeighbourWood Plan, which must be submitted as part of the application, following a set template. Other terms and conditions apply, as described elsewhere in this document.

1. Applications will be assessed based on, among other things, value for money, level of support/commitment from local communities, capacity of applicants to complete the project within a set timescale and to sustain the project into the future, and how each application intends to maximise the potential for recreational use, as appropriate in relation to other sensitivities such as wildlife.
2. The NeighbourWood Scheme is aimed at projects involving the development of attractive woodland setting for people to visit and enjoy. A silvicultural approach is required, involving professional forestry input and using suitable site preparation techniques, planting stock, vegetation management, etc. All applications under the NeighbourWood Scheme must involve the input of a Registered Forester, and this individual must also oversee the implementation of proposed works, if approved. The Forester should have experience of working with Department grant schemes and will be aware of the relevant procedures, standards and environmental guidelines. They will also be familiar with forest establishment and management operations and will be able to identify suitable forest contractors to undertake the work. The engagement of a professional ecologist at design stage is also recommended, to advise in regard to protected habitats and species, and other onsite biodiversity features, both for legal compliance and also to gather information that will later be of interest to users.
3. Forests funded under the NeighbourWood Scheme must be open to the general public throughout the year (although private applicants can opt to close the site for one day in each calendar year, to avoid possible concerns regarding the establishment of access rights). Access must be free-of-charge (apart from charges for car-parking and other basic services, or in relation to the staging of particular events). Projects involving entrance fees, exclusive membership, or some other barrier to general public use, are not eligible under the Scheme, with the following exception:

Projects tailored for specific needs

Opportunities may exist whereby a particular woodland, with enhancement and facilities under the Scheme, is ideally suited to providing for particular sections of the community and particular groups that have specific needs.

In relation to these individuals and groups who experience extra challenges, a tailored visit to an attractive woodland setting carefully designed to cater for their specific needs. Research worldwide shows benefits from visiting and experiencing woodlands that are particularly relevant to such user groups, ranging from the calming effect on teenagers showing aggressive behaviour, to promoting faster recovery for individuals who have come through serious operations.

In such cases, the woodland would be generally limited to catering for such groups (and evidence of same is required – see below) as opposed to being open to the general public on a non-fee paying basis, although owners are encouraged to open up the woodland occasionally on specific days or periods of time (e.g. throughout Tree Week, or on bank holiday weekends). This will promote the role of the woodland within the community and potentially lead to the identification of other individuals and groups who may benefit from tailored visits.

Such projects may also involve payments to the owner for facilitating the above use, and this is accepted as a justified exception under the NeighbourWood Scheme.

Note that where a woodland owner wishes to pursue this application of the Scheme, they must provide evidence of a programme of visits by specific user groups on an ongoing basis throughout the 7-year contract period. This programme can be provided on a year-to-year basis.

Please note, this application of the NeighbourWood Scheme will be operated on a trial basis and relevant applications considered on a case-by-case basis.

4. Suitable projects under the NeighbourWood Scheme will have a clear potential for the development of an attractive recreational forest (or the enhancement of an existing recreational forest) that is strategically located, easily accessible and well-used (actual or potential) by local people. Relevant factors will include the suitability of location, the level of existing use, the level of attractiveness (visual and otherwise), the presence of features of interest (natural, historical and / or cultural), linkage with wider walking routes and other amenities, and of course, the willingness of owners and the users to work together to identify and implement desirable changes.
5. There must be a clear rationale presented for the woodland enhancement works and recreational facilities proposed. The proposal must also demonstrate how conflict is avoided when different types of users are encouraged. For example, incompatible activities such as walking and mountain biking can be separated through intelligent design.
6. The project must adhere to good practice regarding amenity forest design, establishment and management, as set out in *Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for*

Forest Owners and Managers (DAFM, 2006) and the woodland chapter in *Amenity Trees and Woodlands: A Guide to their Management in Ireland* (published by the Tree Council of Ireland, the Arboricultural Association – Irish Branch, and the Society of Irish Foresters). The publication *Management Guidelines for Ireland's Native Woodlands* (Cross & Collins, 2017) will also be relevant regarding the managing of existing forest with native woodland elements. This publication was produced jointly by the National Parks & Wildlife Service (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

7. The project must be developed in partnership with the local community and/or (where relevant) with specific recreational user groups. This partnership must be clearly demonstrated at the application stage in the NeighbourWood Plan. For example, close-to-home 'neighbourwood' projects will often entail a partnership between the local authority (the woodland owner) and the local community. Forests being developed for specific uses, e.g. for birdwatching or to celebrate an important feature or association of local historical or cultural heritage, may entail a partnership between the private forest owner and local interest groups, alongside the County Council's Biodiversity or Heritage Officer.
8. The NeighbourWood Scheme can be used to fund operations directly associated with the enhancement (for recreational use) of existing forests and the introduction and / or upgrading of suitable recreational facilities. Ongoing expenses such as litter collection, the provision of security services, public liability insurance and unspecified contingency funds, are not covered under the Scheme.
9. Facilities funded under Element 2 must be of a high quality and in adherence with available facility-specific guidelines and standards. Facilities must be robust in nature and resistant to degradation over time. They must also visually fit in with the woodland environment, avoiding cluttered, harshly-angled designs and unnatural colours. When detailing the type of facilities proposed, provide details of examples from elsewhere and cite the specific standards and guidelines to be followed.
10. Particular emphasis should be placed on providing reasonable access-for-all, to enable people of varying abilities and needs to use and enjoy the woodland. Consideration should be given to the project design, path construction, and how information regarding walking trails and their surface, slope, length, etc., is presented. The design and construction of facilities are of fundamental importance to ensuring reasonable access for a broad range of differently abled individuals. Presenting information in a way that is self-empowering will allow individuals to decide for themselves which facilities to avail of and enjoy. There are a number of organisations with information and guidance regarding accessibility in the outdoors, these should be consulted during design of the project. Some of these sources are listed below:
 - The Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), general accessibility guidance: *IWA Best Practice Access Guidelines* (4th Edition)
 - The Irish Wheelchair Association, accessibility guidance specific to the outdoors: *IWA Great Outdoors Access Guidelines*
 - Paths for All (UK) in partnership with the Forestry Commission, accessibility guidance specific to the outdoors: *Outdoor Accessibility Guidance*
 - Local County Council: *Healthy Ireland Coordinators*.
 - Local County Council: *Sports and Recreation partnerships*.
11. Projects funded under the Scheme must adopt a clear code of practice for visitors to follow, to protect the forest ecosystem. An excellent example is the 'Leave No Trace'

national outdoor ethics code and its seven principles (see www.leavenotraceireland.org). This code of practice must be displayed on information boards installed at the beginning of walking trails and at other key points throughout the woodland, alongside map information and other useful details about the woodland.

12. While compatible overlap exists between biodiversity and amenity, certain vulnerable habitats and wildlife features, if present onsite, should be kept separate, in order to protect against 'people pressure'. Legally protection regarding certain habitats and species will also require separation. A professional Ecologist can advise on these issues, during project development.
13. In the case of applications on privately-owned land, the applicant must provide a declaration that the amenity will be maintained and access provided for a period of at least 7 years.
14. Various types of projects are not eligible under the NeighbourWood Scheme. These include projects involving lines, avenues or shelterbelts of trees, street or roadside trees, small isolated pockets of planting on large open green spaces, projects involving sites with low fertility, contaminated substrate or building rubble, sites that are highly environmentally sensitive, sites subjected to an incompatible activity, and sites far removed from an obvious 'user group'. Projects dominated by intensive landscape-type planting involving standards, stakes and tree-guards are also unsuitable under the Scheme (although this approach is acceptable around localised high-profile locations within an overall project, e.g. landscaping around an entrance and car-park). Similarly, sites subjected to severe ongoing pressure from exotic invasive species (e.g. rhododendron) and / or extensive grazing, and where such pressure is beyond the owner's scope and capacity to control, may not be eligible, as recreational development in such areas may not be sustainable.
15. Note that the establishment of new forests designed for recreational use (e.g. to expand an existing forest or to create a new forest resource where previously none existed) is funded by the Afforestation Scheme under 'Forest Type' FT4: NeighbourWoods (and to a lesser degree, under FT3). FT4 also includes a provision for the parallel installation of recreational facilities. Applications for FT4 must be made under the Afforestation Scheme, regardless of any parallel application under this NeighbourWood Scheme (e.g. to improve an adjoining woodland for recreational use).
16. Applications under the Scheme will be considered for approval by DAFM on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with the assessment criteria for the Scheme, and subject to available funds. The Department will monitor uptake and may refuse applications or defer approvals in order to ensure a balanced uptake between private and public forest owners and within the latter, between different public bodies. The Department will also seek to achieve a regional spread of projects and a variety of application types.
17. The decision of the Department on any matter relating to this Scheme is final.

SCOPE OF THE NEIGHBOURWOOD SCHEME

The NeighbourWood Scheme is designed to offer considerable flexibility, to reflect the versatility of forests as a recreational resource. As a result, forests funded under this Scheme can be stand-alone amenities or linked with or into other amenities and attractions in the area, such as parkland, historic buildings and wider walking routes. Forests can be located within or near villages, towns or cities, or may be more rural in nature. They can range in size, from pocket forests within built-up areas, to large forests in the countryside. They may be owned by a local council or some other public body, or be privately-owned, where the owner is prepared to allow people to access and enjoy the forest.

The following describes examples of forests and woodlands where the NeighbourWood Scheme may be appropriate as a source of funding, subject to the submission of complete applications, assessment by the Department, and approval. Each example represents a different forest recreation 'theme', and individual projects can comprise two or more themes, depending on user needs and preferences and what the woodland is capable of 'carrying', in terms of the type and extent of recreational activity.

NeighbourWoods

'NeighbourWoods' are accessible, close-to-home woodland amenities developed in partnership with local people and other interested groups and designed for frequent use – often on a daily basis – by members of the local community. Neighbourwoods are used by people of all ages and abilities on a regular – often daily – basis. Examples include friends out for an evening stroll, parents with young children out to while away an hour or two in the open air, or individuals out early in the morning to walk the dog or to go for a jog. Relevant facilities are those that open up the forest to general use without the need for specialised equipment or strenuous effort. Typical facilities include entrances, car parking, a variety of looped footpaths, information signage, waymarkers, nature trails, seats and picnic tables. Though careful design in consultation with representative groups, neighbourwoods also have a strong focus on access-for-all, enabling people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to experience and enjoy the forest environment and the mental and physical well-being that brings.

Neighbourwoods could also be used as a 'broad brush' tool for sustainable planning and development, particularly in urban and urban fringe areas. Woodlands can be used strategically to reinforce existing greenbelts, greenways and sustainable transport corridors, to provide buffers between residential and industrial areas, to protect urban watercourses, and to reclaim former landfill sites and industrial 'brownfield' sites (where basic substrate requirements for woodland establishment are met). Woodland can also be created in the years leading up to development, providing a ready-made green landscape for the future.

In all cases, what makes a woodland a 'NeighbourWood' is how it is perceived by local people. Neighbourwoods are an invaluable community resource and part of the local fabric of life and sense of place. They provide individuals, families and friends time-out and contact with the natural world, promote public health, well-being and a better quality of life, and create a resource for people young and old to learn about nature and the environment.

Active Forests

These are forests located away from centres of population and typically accessed by car. Relevant facilities are those that open up the forest to general use, predominantly by those interested in the great outdoors and longer hikes. Trails are typically less refined than those found in neighbourwoods, with visitors encouraged to use ankle-supported walking boots and hiking poles. Targeted are facilities designed to enable access for walking-based activities (predominantly), and other activities compatible with walking.

Eligible facilities are similar to those for neighbourwoods, but more focused on the provision of longer walks over rougher terrain.

Forest Classrooms

‘Forest classrooms’ go beyond interpretative signage and information boards to develop a direct link between the forest and local schools, both primary and secondary. It involves the forest becoming an extension of the classroom, where students of all ages spend time in the forest setting and use it as the basis of a wide range of subjects throughout the curriculum, from nature studies and art to creative writing. The forest can be used as a window to explore local biodiversity and heritage, or as the basis for projects for the Young Scientist Competition. Activities can be in the forest or back in the school, with students collecting and growing on acorns for planting back in the forest, or developing a small school nursery to grow on the material for ceremonial plantings on the school grounds or in other public spaces.

Such projects should include schools in the consultations leading up to the submission of the application. Strong associations between schools and local forests not only enriches students’ lives, but also engenders closer ties between young people and the forest. This creates future advocates for the ongoing management of the resource and creates the basis for a deeper understanding of the natural world and by extension, environmental challenges, both local and global.

Woodlands in or near centres of population provide the ideal venue for forest classrooms. However, potential also exists in more rural settings, where a forest owner is happy to open up their forest for use by a local National School.

There is huge potential to incorporate forests into a wide range of school subjects, including environmental studies, biology, art and craftwork, history, geography and language. The Tree Council of Ireland’s Tree Day and Tree Week programmes demonstrate this role of woodlands in providing a vibrant educational resource.

The outdoor classroom model can be extended to other groups involving young people, such as scouting organisations. Forests can also be regularly used by 3rd level institutes, eNGOs such as Woodlands of Ireland or Crann, representative organisations such as the Society of Irish Foresters or Pro Silva Ireland, or public agencies such as Teagasc, who organise events to promote good forest practice amongst farm-forest owners.

The above describes how woodlands can be developed – through enhancement work and specific facilities – in a way that supports their use as a forest classroom by local schools and others. In addition to the funds available under the NeighbourWood Scheme to undertake this work, DAFM will also be opening up a separate funding mechanism to encourage visits and walks through the forest by different groups, as also described above. The Forest Classroom Scheme will be operated on a pilot basis, and an open call for proposals, inviting interested applicants to submit proposals under that Scheme, will be conducted in mid-2025.

HeartWoods

‘HeartWoods’ have a strong focus on facilitating outdoor activities and pursuits within the forest that are energetic in nature (e.g. strenuous fitness training, mountain biking) and / or involve specific user groups keen to follow a particular sport or pastime (e.g. birdwatching, mountain biking). They provide a place for people to engage in ‘green exercise’, i.e. regular physical exercise in a safe and relaxing natural outdoor environment.

Larger forest areas in more rural settings can also provide for these activities, at a grander scale, often by linking in with wider tracks and trails. At whatever level, green exercise promotes our physical health and sense of well-being, and is part of the national effort to combat obesity and heart disease and to promote public health.

Heritage Forests

Heritage Forests aim to provide protection and enhancement of the heritage value of our woodlands and forests, from the perspective of nature, culture and history.

These are woodlands where various aspects of the woodland's natural, historical and cultural heritage are celebrated, using facilities such as information boards to highlight nature trails and other themed routes through the forest, and high-quality and sensitively-positioned interactive information boards near heritage sites or features. (While in many cases a compatible overlap will exist between heritage sites or features and enhanced facilities, some sites and features, due to their composition, condition or other vulnerabilities to 'people pressure', may not be suited to certain actions. If such sites and features are present onsite, facilities may need to be kept separate and not disrupt or detract from them).

Heritage Forests will provide protection and enhancement of the heritage value of our woodlands and forests, from the perspective of nature, culture and history.

In many forests there are features such as geological formations, holy wells, fairy or 'rag' trees, historical ruins, or beautiful vistas. Access to these features could be enhanced, and facilities installed, such as themed trails relating to particular heritage features, interpretive boards detailing features and their significance, and increased open space adjacent to features.

Other less-obvious features may merit celebration. For example, there are examples of old forest stands created under State forest planting programmes pursued in the early part of the last century. These often include a variety of exotic conifer species, including Douglas fir, and offer a unique forest experience due to the size of individual trunks and the shade created by the high-up canopy. Such stands are not only part of the local history, but also tell a wider story of early efforts to expand the country's forest resource, a story that can be related to visitors through information panels.

7. Funding Elements

Funding under the NeighbourWood Scheme is available under two separate elements:

- **Element 1: Forest Enhancement for Recreation:** This element provides support for silvicultural works designed to enhance existing forests and to increase their attractiveness and suitability for recreation. Under Element 1, projects can receive up to €6,000 / ha funding, based on approved costs. Individual applications can be no more than 12 ha in area.
- **Element 2: Forest Recreation Facilities:** This element provides funding for the purchase and installation of suitable recreational facilities, both general and specialised, into an existing forest, including recently established forests. Under Element 2, projects can receive up to a maximum €4,200 / ha, based on approved works. Individual applications under this element can be no more than 12 ha in area, capping the total amount available under this element at €50,400.

In addition to the grants detailed above, private applicants under the NeighbourWood Scheme (Element 1 and / or Element 2) may be eligible for an annual Payment for Ecosystem Service (PES) payment. This acknowledges the forest environmental and climate services provided by the forest owner's adoption of alternative management systems that enhance ecosystem services provided, and the associated additional costs incurred in doing so. Specifically, PES 5

(‘People’) applies, set at €90 / ha for 7 years. Note, a single rate applies regardless of whether or not both elements are being applied for.

Both elements of the NeighbourWood Scheme are aimed at public and private forest holders.

The maximum area that can be submitted in an application amounts to a total of 12 hectares. See Section 1. Introduction for the various permutations that can arise in relation to this limit, when combined with the 12 ha limits for each element.

Note that the 12 ha limit that applies to each element is designed to avoid ‘overreach’ and to ensure the completion of projects. Larger projects can be tackled on a phased basis through successive applications year after year. The Department may accept, on a case-by-case basis, applications for larger areas, where the applicant can clearly demonstrate their capacity to complete the works within the normal timeframe of the scheme.

Woodland owners can apply for either or both elements of this Scheme. Where two elements are being applied for, they do not necessarily have to share the same physical ‘footprint’. However, they must both relate to the same recreational forest property and be clearly part of the same overall project. The area relating to the element (or elements) being applied for must be clearly shown on the Certified Species Map accompanying the Form 1.

Note that certain works will not be eligible for funding under the NeighbourWood Scheme, if they are similar in nature to works previously undertaken on site with forestry-related grant aid from the Department within the previous 15 years. This includes silvicultural works and the installation of recreational facilities.

ELEMENT 1: FOREST ENHANCEMENT FOR RECREATION

This element provides support for silvicultural works designed to enhance an existing forest and to increase its sustainability, suitability and attractiveness for recreational use, current or planned. Potential operations include, among others, the removal of invasive species, coupe planting to re-invigorate stagnant canopies, and the replacement of existing conifer stands with native woodland.

Eligible operations under Element 1: Woodland Enhancement are as follows:

- Preparation of NeighbourWood plan
- Purchase of suitable forest transplant stock and whips
- Ground preparation
- Fencing, tree shelters and other protective measures
- Clearance of invasive species such as laurel and rhododendron
- The felling of single or small groups of trees, where necessary and justified (e.g. due to health and safety along a proposed forest trail, to eliminate the source of vigorous regeneration by non-native trees such as a sycamore, or to open up the canopy to diversify the age class and structure of the forest) (see Note 1)
- Understorey and coupe planting
- Maintenance (including vegetation management)
- Woodland edge management
- Maintenance of open spaces
- Respacing
- Reforestation of an existing conifer stand with native woodland (see Notes 2 & 3)

- Other appropriate operations, where pre-approved by the Department (e.g. natural regeneration works)

Notes

1. Note that tree felling may require a Tree Felling Licence. If required, submit the application for a Tree Felling Licence with the NeighbourWood Scheme application, ensuring that the area being applied for in relation to the licence lies wholly within the footprint of the area been applied for under Element 1: Enhancement. Also, DAFM may seek details of any marketable timber sold following such operation, and the level of funding available under this element of the Scheme may be reduced accordingly.
2. Sites that have been recently clearfelled are also eligible if associated with an application under the former Native Woodland Conservation Scheme, available under the previous Forestry Programme. In such cases, the reduction in the available grant amount, as described under Footnote 3, applies.
3. Where reforestation of an existing conifer stand, is proposed, and where marketable quantities of timber have or will be realised through the clearfelling of the conifer stand, the level of funding available under this element of the Scheme will be reduced by €2,000 / ha for the area undergoing replacement. This is to take account of the standard replacing costs that would have been borne by the forest owner following commercial clearfelling. Also note that the cost of the clearfelling operation (including extraction) is not an eligible operation under the NeighbourWood Scheme.

ELEMENT 2: FOREST RECREATION FACILITIES

Element 2 provides funding for the installation and / or upgrading (e.g. by supplementing existing walks and facilities in forests) of suitable recreational facilities that enable access to, and enjoyment of, an existing woodland. These can include general features such as trails, seats, signs (including directional and interpretative) and parking, to cater for the general user, and to more specialised facilities for particular user groups. Under Element 2, projects can receive up to €4,200 / ha, based on approved works. Individual applications under Element 2 can be no greater than 12 ha in area, unless the applicant can clearly demonstrate a capacity to undertake installation works over larger areas within the timeframe of the Scheme payment window.

Eligible operations under Element 2 of the NeighbourWood Scheme are as follows:

- Preparation of the NeighbourWood Plan
- Materials, items and works associated with the installation of appropriate recreational facilities within an existing woodland.
- On application, other related facilities, as deemed appropriate and as approved by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine

Previously in this document, various types of amenity woodlands and forests were described in order to inspire applicants and user groups to think carefully about what exactly they wanted the woodland (or parts thereof) to cater for. The following lists describe the type of facilities that might apply under each category. These are only a selection and there is obvious crossover between categories, but again, it is hoped that these lists will prompt a more detailed consideration of the issues by those involved in planning the project. Other facilities will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Category of amenity woodland	Examples of suitable facilities
Neighbourwood	Footpaths Signage Information boards Waymarkers Car-parking Seating Picnic tables Playground equipment
Active Forest	Marked trails of varying difficulty Directional signs Boardwalks over wet terrain Parking facilities for cars and bikes Seating at and developed viewpoints Basic camping facilities Appropriately sites fire pits / BBQ sites

Forest Classroom	Footpaths Car parking Coach parking facilities Tables Basic shelters Seated areas for open classroom Basic camping facilities Appropriately sites fire pits / BBQ sites
HeartWood	Bird hides Outdoor gym equipment Fishing piers Mountain bike or horse-riding trails Scouting or orienteering facilities Camping facilities Basic camping facilities Appropriately sites fire pits / BBQ sites
Heritage Forest	Themed trails to a particular heritage feature Interpretative boards regarding the heritage feature and its significance

All facilities must satisfy the following criteria:

- Applications will be assessed by reference to, *inter alia*, value for money, proximity to population centres, level of support/commitment from local communities, capacity of applicants to complete the project within a set timescale and to sustain the project into the future, and how each application intends to maximise the potential for recreational use.
- There must be a clear rationale presented for the facilities proposed and their distribution throughout the forest. There must be a logical flow throughout the forest, and good integration with attractions (e.g. views) and other features (e.g. local walking routes). The proposal must also demonstrate how conflict is avoided between different types of use encouraged. For example, incompatible activities such as walking and mountain biking can be separated through zoning. See DAFM's *Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers*.
- Facilities must be of a high quality and in adherence with available facility-specific guidelines and standards. Favour quality over quantity. Focus on positioning a carefully selected number of high quality facilities at key points within the woodland. When detailing the type of facilities proposed, provide details of examples from elsewhere and cite the specific guidelines and standards to be followed.
- Facilities funded under Element 2 must be of a high quality and in adherence with available facility-specific guidelines and standards. Facilities must be robust in nature and

resistant to degradation over time. They must also visually fit in with the woodland environment, avoiding cluttered, harshly-angled designs and unnatural colours.

- Applicants must consider, where possible, visitors and users of all ages and abilities, from the perspective of access for all. This not only applies to members of the community with particular needs that are permanent in nature, as everyone will experience periods within their lifetime during which, their ability to enjoy outdoor recreation will be impaired, unless specifically catered for. Examples include: the option of a looped walk following a level route and with a smooth wide surface; consideration during the design of a bird hide, to facilitate wheelchair users to also view out in comfort; and the incorporation of braille on signage celebrating a particular aspect of the forest's natural, historic or cultural heritage. It is also important to be accurate and concise when describing the facilities on offer within the woodland, and to allow individuals to decide themselves what they are capable of. For more details on promoting access for all, see Section 6.
- Facilities should be positioned throughout the submitted area. If an area is not 'serviced' by facilities but still applied for under Element 1: Enhancement, provide clear rationale for this. For example, *"The entire forest is already serviced by an existing well-marked trail network, but particular facilities A, B and C are needed at locations X, Y and Z."*
- 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. Projects involving recreational trail development should adhere to the guidance available from Sport Ireland ([Trail Development | Sport Ireland](#)). 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.
- Areas submitted under the NeighbourWood Scheme may also be eligible under the Forest Road Scheme (and associated Special Construction Works for bridges and other road features), subject to the requirements of that scheme. The resulting road could form a central spine for recreational use, by providing multiple points for accessing different walking trails.
- The application must demonstrate a commitment of ongoing monitoring of the facilities, and prompt repair and replacement, if needed, during the contract period of the Scheme (i.e. 7 years).
- Where Element 2 is being applied for in tandem with Element 1, there must be a clear association between both submitted areas. If this is not the case, provide clear rationale as to why so. For example, *"The entire forest is submitted under Element 1 for enhancement works A, B and C. The entire forest is already serviced by a well-marked trail network, but particular facilities D, E and F are needed within the western portion of the overall forest. Hence the area submitted under Element 2 is less than that under Element 1."*
- Wherever welcoming signage, information panels and other facilities acknowledge those parties responsible for supporting the project, the Department must be acknowledged and its logo included. The following text will suffice: *"This project is supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine under the NeighbourWood Scheme, as part of the Forestry Programme 2023 to 2027."* This text and the Department logo must be positioned on par with similar text and logos of other project sponsors.
- Provide full details of the proposed facilities, in the submitted NeighbourWood Plan. This includes proposed positions, dimensions and other specifications. Established design standards should be used where available, and cited in the Plan. If possible, include photos of the proposed facilities (or similar) *in situ* elsewhere.

- Facilities targeting particular user groups can be submitted, e.g. hides for birdwatching. However, in such cases, the Department 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 Department to be highly specialised in nature (such as children's' playground equipment) will not be eligible for funding under the NeighbourWood Scheme, due to their highly technical nature and unit cost. Applicants are encouraged to seek alternative sources of funding for these features. If you are uncertain regarding whether or not a particular facility is eligible under Element 2, contact the Department (at Forest.Environment@agriculture.gov.ie) for clarification.
- Unless otherwise agreed in advance with DAFM, the positioning and design specifications detailed in the application form must be adhered to. Applicants are encouraged to adhere to established standards and specifications regarding outdoor recreational facilities, while also reflecting the forest setting.

Tackling larger forests

Please note, individual applications under the Scheme can be no greater than 12 ha in area. Applications for both Element 1 and Element 2 can be for up to 12 ha each, where both elements share the same 'footprint' of land. However, if Element 1 and Element 2 relate to different footprints of land (even if overlapping), the combined area must be no greater than 12 ha. See Section 1: Introductions for details on the different permutations that might arise. Larger sites can be funded under the Scheme by submitting separate applications for separate areas over consecutive years, at a rate of one application per year.

This requirement is set in order to ensure that the amount of work required to implement an approved project before payment is eligible for drawing-down, does not overwhelm the applicant and their capacity and resources.

Note, previous approval for one application in relation to a wider forest recreation project, does not guarantee subsequent approval for any follow-up application for that same overall project. Each application made must be stand-alone, and not contingent on subsequent applications being approved.

Relationship with other relevant Schemes and licence applications.

Please note that the establishment of new woodlands designed for recreational use (e.g. to expand an existing forest or to create a new forest resource where previously none existed) is funded by the Afforestation Scheme, principally under 'Forest Type' FT4. Applications for FT4 must be made under the Afforestation Scheme, regardless of any parallel application under the NeighbourWood Scheme, e.g. to enhance an adjoining woodland.

Applicants may wish to pursue applications under the Native Woodland Conservation Scheme or reforestation options under the Climate Resilient Reforestation Scheme to undertake silvicultural operations, alongside an application under Element 2 of the NeighbourWood Scheme, to develop appropriate facilities within the woodland. This is acceptable to the Department, but ensure than all of the relevant scheme applications clearly cross-reference the other schemes being applied for.

Proposed operations under Element 1 and Element 2 of the NeighbourWood Scheme may necessitate tree felling. Under the Forestry Act 2014, apart from certain exemptions, tree felling requires a Tree Felling Licence from DAFM. For details (including what constitutes 'exempt trees') see DAFM's *Felling & Reforestation Policy* document (gov.ie - [Tree Felling Licences](#)). Any necessary application for a Tree Felling Licence relating to an application under Element 1 and / or Element 2 should be submitted with the NeighbourWood Scheme application. The TFL

application ‘footprint’ must not extend beyond the project area of the Scheme application. The operations described in the accompanying Harvest Plan must be consistent with the Scheme application, and *vice versa*. Clear cross-referencing and the use of the same plot numbers across both applications is also necessary.

If the licence has been applied for beforehand and not yet issued by DAFM, ensure that this is clearly stated and detailed on the Scheme’s Form 1. If a Tree Felling Licence has already been issued by DAFM, cite the TFL reference number issued and relevant details.

8. Eligibility

1. Individuals applying for participation in the NeighbourWood 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).
2. The Applicant applying for 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.
3. In order to qualify for payment of the NeighbourWood Scheme grants, the applicant must own, lease or be in joint management of the lands proposed for woodland enhancement and recreational facilities. Applicants must provide documentary evidence of ownership and of leasing or joint management where relevant if requested, as detailed in DAFM’s *Forestry Standards Manual*.
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. Every effort should be made by Registered Foresters to ensure that multiple applications by the same applicant are not submitted. If more than one application is submitted for the same piece of land, the Department may decide to process just one application selected by the applicant within any 12-month period.
6. Public and private forest holders will be eligible for support. Eligibility for the PES Premium is limited to private forest holders.

9. Grant and Payment for Ecosystem Services

Grants are available to public and private forest owners for projects which comply with the requirements, terms and conditions of the NeighbourWood Scheme for the enhancement of recreational forests (Element 1) and the introduction of recreational facilities (Element 2), to cover approved costs under both elements up to the maximum amounts laid down in Annex 1.

Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium

Private applicants under Element 1 and / or Element 2 of the NeighbourWood Scheme are eligible for a new Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) (‘People’) premium of €90 / ha / year, with a 7-year duration.

PES premiums aim to promote the longer-term sustainable management of the ecosystem services of the forests, in particular encouraging forest owners of productive forests to manage their forests with a view to maximising various ecosystem services in the areas of carbon sequestration, fuelwood, the protection of water and soil, forest genetic resource, pest and disease resilience, climate change regulation, the control of floodwaters, pollination, recreation, tourism, education and cultural heritage. In addition, recreational forests receiving funding under the Scheme also require continued management to be able to provide the maximum range of ecosystem services.

Payments

Application for payment of the fixed grant may be made following completion of works, in accordance with the terms of the Approval. The time limit for submission of claims for the fixed grant (Form 2) will be 12 weeks after date of completion of works. Where a Form 2 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 for payment can be accepted.

Annex 1 details the grant rate payable under 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 in relation to the approved application for a period of 6 years following payment of the fixed grant. The Minister may, at their discretion, require the submission to the Department of such receipts and/or invoices at any time during this period.

10. Conditions of Aid

Where an application is made 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 NeighbourWood 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 application forms including Form 1 and the NeighbourWood Plan, letters of approval and, where appropriate, remedial work notifications, form the terms and conditions of this contract. The contract will be identified by the contract number assigned to it by the Department when the application for approval (Form 1) is received.

Payments will be based on either the area claimed as eligible for payment by the applicant (on Form 2 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 plantation) is the sum of the areas of the individual forest plots (excluding biodiversity) comprising that contract number or plantation. 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 plantation 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 plantation. The determined area is calculated by excluding any ineligible areas (e.g. power line corridors, rock, gas lines, ineligible areas of biodiversity).

- 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 a grant. The claimed area is calculated by the applicant by deducting any part of the plot that is not eligible to receive a woodland improvement grant (e.g. power line corridors, rock, gas line and eligible biodiversity areas) 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 woodland improvement grants will be based, subject to compliance with the requirements of the Scheme as regards submission of proof of ownership, if requested.

Where an area delineated as the payable area on a map submitted by the applicant differs from the area specified on the species plot table attached to a map or the area specified on the Form 2, the lesser of these areas will be deemed to be the area claimed by the applicant.

Where a notification (i.e. a remedial works letter) is issued to the applicant specifying remedial works required to bring the project area 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 Department will result in a penalty, as set out in the document titled *Forestry Schemes Penalty Schedules (DAFM 2023)*.

Grants will be paid only when the entire treated area is up to the required standard. If part of the treated area fails inspection, payment will be withheld on the entire area until remedial works are carried out to the required standard.

Where the Department decides that it is not possible to bring the project area (including recreational facilities), or part thereof, up to the required standard, no further payment will be made for that area. Where the grant and/or part thereof, is not to be paid, the Department may also require repayment of the amount paid in respect of the project area or in respect of the area that does not meet the required standard.

Payments shall be made in respect of applicants who make valid applications prepared by a Registered Forester and who have, managed the forest in accordance with the conditions in the approval and in compliance with:

- i. All relevant EU requirements and national legislation for the time being in force;
- ii. The terms and conditions of this Scheme as set out in this document (and any revisions thereof), any circulars amending the Scheme requirements, the application form (including the NeighbourWood Plan), letters of approval and, where appropriate, remedial works notifications; and
- iii. DAFM's *Standards for Felling and Reforestation and Environmental Requirements for Afforestation* (where relevant).

11. Application Procedure

Application for approval under the NeighbourWood Scheme must be made on iNET, through the completion of the online fields, declarations, etc. and the uploading of prescribed documentation and maps.

Email Addresses	Queries
approvals.forests@agriculture.gov.ie	Preapproval, NeighbourWood Scheme approvals, application procedures
1stgrant@agriculture.gov.ie	Application for first instalment payment
Felling.forests@agriculture.gov.ie	Tree Felling Licences
Forest.Environment@agriculture.gov.ie	For general enquiries regarding the NeighbourWood Scheme

The appropriate documentation and maps must be submitted to the Department within any timeframes indicated below for each stage.

11.1 iNET Preapproval Submission: Application for NeighbourWood Scheme Approval

- 11.1.1. Application for approval under Element 1 and / or Element 2 of the NeighbourWood Scheme must be made using iNET and critically, a NeighbourWood Plan must be submitted. This Plan must adhere to the template provided by DAFM, which can be downloaded and completed on computer. Also note Annex B of this Scheme document, included to assist the completion of the plan. The applicant and a Registered Forester must complete the application following a site visit and detailed field assessment by the Registered Forester, and consultation with relevant user groups (which will vary, depending on the recreational themes being pursued). All applications must be approved before the commencement of any associated works.
- 11.1.2. Approval for Elements 1 and 2 of the NeighbourWood Scheme is only valid up to and including the expiry date specified in the letter of approval.
- 11.1.3. Approval under the Scheme may be subject to additional conditions as laid down by the Minister in the approval letter. 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 and all conditions set out in the approval letter. The Department accepts no responsibility or liability for costs incurred by an applicant on foot of approval or at all.
- 11.1.4. The following maps shall be included in the application:
 - Location map, depicting the overall forest boundary and nearest township.
 - A map clearly showing the extent of the area submitted under Element 1 and Element 2 (note, these may or may not overlap, but both must be contained within the forest property).
 - Biodiversity Map.
 - Habitat Map.

- Element 1 map, clearly showing the proposed operations within the area presented under this element.
- Element 2 map, clearly showing the proposed facilities within the area presented under this element.

Also required are details and design specs. for any facilities proposed, drawing from established guides and standards.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to inform the Department in writing of any proposed material change to the approval issued and to seek approval for any such change before related works commence. Failure to obtain approval from the Department for proposed changes may render the approval null and void.

11.2 iNET Application for payment: Application for Payment of Grant and PES Premium (if applicable)

- 11.2.1. Application for payment of the NeighbourWood Scheme grant must be made using iNET. The time limit for receipt of the Form 2 by the Department shall be 12 weeks after the date of completion of all works for which, funding is sought. Where a Form 2 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. Only submit a single Form 2, even if the project seeks funding under both Element 1 and Element 2.

The applicant and their Registered Forester must complete the application following a site visit and a detailed assessment by the Registered Forester. The application form sets out the requirements to be met to make a valid application.

- 11.2.2. Where a Form 2 application is lodged with the Department within the required 12 week timeframe but supporting documentation remains to be submitted, the application will be held open for a maximum of 2 calendar years from the date of completion of the works.

Non-payment of a Registered Forester (or Forestry Company), or any other party, for works carried out in relation to the project, will be a matter for resolution between the applicant and the party(-ies) involved, and the Minister shall bear no liability.

- 11.2.3. Form 2 payments will be assessed by comparing the works completed on-the-ground and the works for which approval was sought and given. Where scheduled actions are not undertaken, the Form 2 payment may not be made.
- 11.2.4. Tree felling associated with the project may need a tree felling licence under the Forestry Act 2014. For details, see DAFM's Felling and Reforestation Policy document. (2017). Submit the relevant tree felling licence with the NeighbourWood Scheme application, ensuring consistency between the operations proposed in each, and clear cross-referencing. The 'footprint' of the TFL application can be smaller, but in all cases must be contained within, that of the Scheme.

11.3 Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium

- 11.3.1. A specific Payment for Ecosystem Services ('People') may apply in the case of private applicants under Element 1 and / or Element 2 of the NeighbourWood Scheme, amounting to €90 / ha / year, with a 7-year duration. See Section 9 for details.

The first NeighbourWood PES Premium is paid to the applicant alongside the grant instalment. The relevant application form (NeighbourWood Scheme Form 4: PES Premium) for the second and subsequent PES Premiums are posted to the applicant by the Department on an annual basis.

- 11.3.4. Payment of this premium is contingent on the satisfactory completion of the Form 2 works and the ongoing management of the woodland in accordance with the NeighbourWood approval letter and the terms and conditions set out elsewhere in this document. Assuming same, the PES Premium will be paid on the basis of one each calendar year, commencing in the year in which the grant instalment was paid.
- 11.3.6. Subject to and limited by the duration of the contract period under the NeighbourWood Scheme (7 years), each NeighbourWood Scheme PES Premium is normally applied for in the year in which it is due for payment. Where such an 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 3 years of the 1st of 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 2025 must, at the latest, be applied for and paid by 31st December 2027. 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.

Note, all payments under the NeighbourWood Scheme, including the grant payment and PES Premium payments (if applicable), may be recovered if the woodland has not been maintained to the standard set by the Department, throughout the 7-year contract period.

12. Further Information

12.1 Information on the NeighbourWood Scheme and designing and managing for forest recreation, is available from the following sources:

- The NeighbourWood Plan template (and guidance therein) is designed not only to gather information DAFM needs to assess the proposed project, but also to direct the applicant and partners through various decisions that need to be made in relation to forest development. Also note Annex 2 of this Scheme document, included to assist in the completion of the plan.
- DAFM's *Forestry Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* (2006) provides direction on assessing and realising the recreational potential of individual forests. These guidelines deal with issues such as consultation with recreational users, access for all, recreational facilities, safety, environmental education, and integration with local trails, tourist enterprises and heritage attractions.
- The publication entitled *Amenity Trees and Woodlands: A Management Guide to their Management in Ireland* (2010) provides useful guidance and references, particularly in relation to its chapters on amenity woodlands and local participation. This publication was published by the Tree Council of Ireland, the Arboricultural Association (Irish Branch) and the Society of Irish Foresters. Contact the Tree Council of Ireland (trees@treecouncil.ie) for copies.

- The publication *Management Guidelines for Ireland's Native Woodlands* (2017), produced jointly by DAFM and the National Parks & Wildlife Service, will provide useful information on management practices that will be directly applicable to many NeighbourWood Scheme projects, particularly those with a native woodland 'slant'. It also contains information in relation to woodland ecology, which can inform any text used to promote the NeighbourWood Scheme project, including onsite interpretative boards.
- For information on recreational trail development, see *A Guide to Planning and Developing Recreational Trails in Ireland* and *Management Standards for Recreational Trails*, both published by Sport Ireland Outdoors (see www.sportireland.ie/outdoors/trail-development).
- The Department has worked closely with the Climate Action Regional Offices (CARO) in relation to that organisation's efforts to promote woodland creation among Local Authorities. Although aimed specifically at Local Authorities and opportunities for native woodland creation under the Afforestation Scheme, the FAQ resource developed by CARO will be highly relevant to the NeighbourWood Scheme. This resource is available at <https://www.caro.ie/knowledge-hub/climate-action-links/woodlands-creation-on-public-lands>
- The application process under the NeighbourWood Scheme requires the input of a Registered Forester. This individual will have an in-depth knowledge of the Department's forestry schemes and associated terms and conditions, including those relating to the protection of the environment. If approved, they must also be involved in the implementation of the project and the submission of the application for grant payment. Many Registered Foresters will also have direct experience of working with earlier iterations of the NeighbourWood Scheme.
- Numerous projects have been completed throughout Ireland under previous iterations of this Scheme. As such, there is a wealth for learning to be gained by contacting the parties involved. Contact the Department (at Forest.Environment@agriculture.gov.ie), should you wish to get in touch with key parties involved in implementing related projects. (Please include 'NeighbourWood Scheme query' in the e-mail title, and state your county.)

13. Environmental Considerations and Other Information

- 13.1 All projects applied for under the NeighbourWood Scheme will undergo an environment assessment procedure, including appropriate assessment as required, as part of DAFM's forestry licence and scheme application process.
- 13.2 The Department may also, at its discretion, require other forms of technical investigation and reports to be submitted to facilitate its assessment of an application received under the NeighbourWood Scheme. These may include an ecological assessment and report by a suitably qualified person.

14. Consultation and Public Notification

- 14.1 The Department may consult with relevant bodies such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Monuments Service, Inland Fisheries Ireland, the relevant Local Authority, as part of its assessment of an application under the NeighbourWood Scheme, including any parallel felling licence application.
- 14.2 A 30-day public notification period will be applied where information relating to appropriate assessment (Stage 2) is submitted or generated internally by DAFM. This relates the requirement under the EU Habitats Directive (transposed) to ensure that the project does not have any adverse effects on the integrity of a European Site (i.e. SAC or SPA), alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

Forestry Licence Viewer (FLV)

To aid consultation and public notification of forestry 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.

Applications made to the NeighbourWood Scheme may be advertised on the FLV where it has been determined that additional information received or prepared in relation to the application, i.e. in the form of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) or an Appropriate Assessment Report (AAR), should be so published. The public may make a submission or observation in writing concerning that application to the Minister within 30 days from the date of publication of the notice.

A list of documents made available in the FLV is included below. Note, this list is not exhaustive, and nor is every document listed relevant to every project.

- Scheme application (as completed on iNET)
- NeighbourWood Plan
- Location Map
- Biodiversity Map
- Habitat Map
- Element 1 and 2 maps
- Details and Design Specifications
- AA Pre-screening report
- Natura Impact Statement (NIS)
- Appropriate Assessment Screening Report and Determination
- Appropriate Assessment Report
- Prescribed body letters – NPWS, local authorities, An Taisce, Inland Fisheries
- Responses from referral bodies

- Submissions (from the public or other third parties)
- Submission acknowledgements
- Requests for further information (FIR)
- Information submitted following FIR
- AA determination
- In-combination Report
- Decision letters – Technical Approval Letter

15. Conditionality and Land Use Reconciliation Requirements

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.

Further information in relation to Conditionality is available from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine website at [gov.ie - Conditionality \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie - Conditionality (www.gov.ie))

Beneficiaries of the NeighbourWood Scheme must ensure that 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 that is the subject of a claim under another area-based scheme administered by the Department.

16. Good Practice and SFM

- 16.1. Adherence to good forestry practice and the principles of sustainable forest management (SFM) is mandatory and applies across all operations of the Scheme. In relation to good practice in relation to amenity and recreation, see *Forest Recreation in Ireland: A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* (DAFM, 2006).
- 16.2. Health and Safety are of paramount importance in forestry operations. The Health and Safety Authority have published a number of guides on Health and Safety in the Forestry Sector which can be found at: https://www.hsa.ie/eng/your_industry/agriculture_forestry/

17. Payment

- 17.1. 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 to a registered forester or forestry company using a mandate document that satisfies the requirements of the Minister as set out in the *Forest 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 Department, 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.
- 17.2. If it is subsequently found that any undue payment or overpayment has occurred in respect of any grant or other payment made under the Scheme, the Department will recover the entire amount of the undue payment or overpayment from the applicant, regardless of how the undue payment or overpayment arose.
- 17.3. 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.

18. Penalties

- 18.1. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the Scheme, incorporating The *Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland; Forest Standards Manual*; circulars amending Scheme requirements; and the relevant environmental guidelines and requirements may result in an appropriate penalty or sanction being applied.
- 18.2. Penalties which shall apply to certain specific breaches of the Scheme are set out in the document titled *Forestry Schemes Penalty Schedules (DAFM 2023)* 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.
- 18.3. Penalties may include the repayment of all or part of the grant. 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.
- 18.4. 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.
- 18.5. 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.
- 18.6. 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.

19. Appeals

If an Applicant is dissatisfied with any decision made by the Department regarding the NeighbourWood Scheme, it is open to him / her to appeal against that decision to the Agriculture Appeals Office, Kilminchy Court, Portlaoise, Co. Laois (e-mail appeals@agriappeals.gov.ie or phone 057 866 7167). The appeal must be made in writing within 3 months of the date of the decision in question being notified to the Applicant. The appeal must include the facts and contentions on which the Applicant intends to rely, together with such documentary evidence that the Applicant wishes to submit in support of his / her appeal.

20. Change of Applicant

- 20.1. The Department must be notified in advance if:
- (a) a grant-aided forest is transferred, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of by the applicant during the term of the agroforestry maintenance contract; or
 - (b) a judgement mortgage or an inhibition or similar restriction is placed on the Folio for the afforested land during the term of the contract.
- 20.2. In the event of the death of the applicant i.e. owner, joint owner or joint manager who was claiming the woodland improvement grant, the Department must be notified as soon as possible by the deceased's next-of-kin, legal personal representatives or registered forester.
- 20.3. When notice of a change of ownership is received by the Department, payment will be suspended until a new applicant is registered in the Scheme. The new owner will be entitled to apply for the woodland improvement grant.
- 20.4. 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.
- 20.5. 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. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. delays in finalizing a deceased person's estate), the date by which documents must be submitted may be extended at the discretion of the Minister.
- 20.6. All decisions regarding eligibility for payment of grant 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 plantation 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, they will be eligible to apply for payment of grants due for the period after the date of the deed if not already paid.
- 20.7. The Minister will refuse payment of grant to the previous owner(s) if they have failed to maintain the plantation to the standard required under the Scheme for the period of the woodland improvement contract under their ownership.
- 20.8. The Department will not divide grant payments according to ownership for part of a year; individual grant 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.
- 20.9. In exceptional circumstances affecting a change of ownership process, at their discretion, the Minister may extend the closing date of a contract subject to such conditions as may be specified by the Minister.
- 20.10. 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 they received.

- 20.11. 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 \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie – Grant-aided Forestry – Change of Ownership or Applicant (www.gov.ie))
- 20.12. The Minister reserves the right to alter these procedures from time to time.

21. Joint Management Consent

- 21.1. A landowner may enter into a joint management arrangement with an immediate family member to jointly manage the forest and assign the woodland improvement grants 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 in the *Forestry Standards Manual* (on the website under Forestry Publications).
- 21.2. The owner of the land and the applicant are both liable for the repayment of grants paid if the applicant fails to abide by the conditions of the Scheme.
- 21.3. A joint management arrangement may be cancelled at any time provided the owner takes over the obligations of the Scheme.

22. Right of Entry

- 22.1. 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 NeighbourWood grants have been paid or claimed under this Scheme or any other forest-related Scheme. Applicants are obliged to ensure that, where required, adequate access to the land and forests is provided to allow inspections by the Department.

23. Responsibility for Forest Management

- 23.1. Responsibility for the successful works to a forest rest with the applicant. Where an applicant contracts the services of a third party to harvest 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 due 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.
- 23.2. The inspection of a forest by the Department shall not relieve the Applicant of responsibility for the accuracy of applications submitted, the successful thinning and tending 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 work by the applicant or their forester. The Department does not guarantee the success of any Seed Stand Management works or bear any liability in respect of any plantation for which it has granted pre-approval in any circumstances. It is the sole responsibility of the applicant who submits land for the NeighbourWood Scheme to ensure that the woodland is managed in accordance with the approved NeighbourWood Plan. If the Department subsequently determines that the woodland, or part thereof, has not been managed in accordance with the Plan, the applicant will be required to repay

all grants and PESs in respect of any part(s) of the woodland that has not been managed as approved.

24. Insurance

- 24.1. Applicants should ensure that their forest has adequate insurance cover against damage from, inter alia, fire, and windblow, pest and disease, etc.

25. Failure to abide by the terms and conditions of the Scheme

- 25.1. Where, for the purposes of obtaining payment under this Scheme, the applicant or a person acting on their 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.
- 25.2. Where an Applicant or a person acting on their 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.
- 25.3. The obtaining of aid under the Scheme by fraudulent means by the applicant or others acting alone or together may render such persons liable to prosecution.

26. Overpayments made in relation to a Scheme contract

- 26.1. Where any overpayment is made due, inter alia, to over claim or over declaration by the applicant or their agent, or to error or miscalculation by the applicant, their agent, or the Department, the money overpaid may at the discretion of the Minister be recouped from the applicant who received the overpayment. Such recoupment will be decided on a case-by-case basis, taking into account any mitigating factors, including culpability.
- 26.2. 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.

27. Review of Financial Aids

- 27.1. The Minister reserves the right in their absolute discretion to vary, where occasion so demands, the amount of financial aid wherever specified in the Scheme.

28. Procedures

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

29. Tax Clearance Requirement

- 29.1. 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.

30. Value Added Tax

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

31. Data Protection – Data Protection Notice

31.1 Part A: Information applicable to all the Departments customers:

- 31.1.1. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is fully committed to keeping all personal data, submitted by our customers, fully safe and secure during our administrative processes. All necessary technical measures have been put in place to ensure the safety and security of our systems which hold this data. The staff of the Department are also considered customers of the Department from a Data Protection perspective and may exercise their rights in the same way.
- 31.1.2. Transparency and openness in the use of personal data held is important to the Department and therefore we aim to fully inform all our customers about the purpose(s) that their data will be used for and why, where it may be shared elsewhere and why and how long their data may be held for by the Department. Information on the rights of the customers will also be provided.
- 31.1.3. The current legislation for Data Protection in Ireland is the Data Protection Act 1998 as amended by the 2003 Data Protection Act. The General Data Protection Regulations (EU 2016/679) will come into effect on 25 May 2018.
- 31.1.4. Information in relation to the operation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is available on the Department's website <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/ef9f6-data-protection/>. For further details on the Forestry Division Privacy Notice, please click [here](#).
- 31.1.5. The Data Controller for the collection of all personal data in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the Minister for DAFM, as the legal entity.
- 31.1.6. The Data Protection Officer can be contacted as follows:
Data Protection Officer
Data Protection Unit,
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Government Buildings, Old Abbeylax Road,
Portlaoise, Co Laois R32 RPA6

E-mail: dataprotectionofficer@agriculture.gov.ie
- 31.1.7. Personal data processed by the Department will only be used for the specific purpose (s) as outlined when the data is collected and will only be used in accordance with the Data Protection legislation in force.
- 31.1.8. Rights of the Individual in relation to personal data held by the Department:

When you, as a customer, provide personal data to the Department you have certain rights available to you in relation to that data. These rights are as listed below and can be exercised by contacting the Data Protection Officer, as detailed above:
- 31.1.9. Currently the customer has the following rights (up to May 2018):
- The individual has the right to access to their data.
 - The individual has the right to rectification of their data
 - The individual has the right to erasure of their data
 - The individual has the right to lodge a complaint with the Supervisory Authority

- From 25 May 2018 onwards all customers will also have the following additional rights:
 - The individual has the right to restriction of processing
 - The right to data portability
 - The individual has the right to object to processing
 - The individual has the right to withdraw consent if they previously gave it

31.2 Part B – Information specific to the personal data being collected

The following data is specific information in relation to the personal data processed for the NeighbourWood Scheme

SPECIFIED PURPOSE:

- 31.2.1. The purpose for collection and use of the data shall not extend beyond the NeighbourWood Scheme and elements therein, and the objectives of this Scheme as outlined. This may include future surveys to determine the level of forest management activity undertaken following participation in the Scheme.
- 31.2.2. The organisers\administrators and facilitators undertake to treat all information, particularly personal data as confidential and to comply with all directions of DAFM with regard to the use and application of all and any confidential information.

LEGAL BASIS:

- 31.2.3. The decision to participate in the NeighbourWood Scheme and consequently send your contact details to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is entirely your decision; there is no legal basis compelling you to send the Department your contact details.

RECIPIENTS:

- 31.2.4. Organisers\administrators, facilitators and participants/nominees should be aware that all the information supplied on applications and in any supporting or related documentation shall be made available to any other Department or Agency solely for audit and evaluation purposes and as appropriate, and that the results of which may be made public. No individual will be identified.
- 31.2.5. All information held on the Department systems may be made available to the DAFM or to any other Department or Agency where required, for Scheme evaluation and statistical purposes, the results of which may be made public. No individual will be identified.
- 31.2.6. In accordance with the European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agriculture and forestry sector and in rural areas, data of beneficiaries of funding under the Forestry Programme 2023 – 2027 will be published and may be processed by auditing and investigating bodies of the European Union. This information will be published and will include the full text of the notified aid Scheme and it's implementing provisions, the granting authority, the names of the individual beneficiaries, the Scheme type and amount of aid granted to each beneficiary, the region at Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics level II in which the beneficiary is located and the principal economic sector in which the beneficiary has its activities, at NACE group level (Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community). This will

only apply to beneficiaries where the cumulative aid amount granted at financial approval is greater than €10,000 for beneficiaries active in the primary agriculture production and €100,000 for others for the amount of aid granted at the time of financial approval discounted at the rate at the time. Such information will be published after the granting decision has been taken and will be kept for at least 10 years and shall be available for the general public without restrictions. These records must be maintained for 10 years from the date of award of the aid and must be provided to the Commission upon request.

- 31.2.7. Information supplied to the Department may be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003. All personal data will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003.

TRANSFERRED OUTSIDE THE EU:

- 31.2.8. Data will not be transferred outside the EU.

RETENTION PERIOD:

- 31.2.9. Data collected for this purpose will be held by the Department only as long as there is a business need to do so in line with the purpose(s) for which it was collected. After this time it will be marked for destruction and will be destroyed in line with internal guidelines or guidelines for destruction received from the National Archives Office or associated permissions received from them

DATA PROVISION BEING STATUTORY OR CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATION:

- 31.2.10. Submission of signed application forms confirm acceptance of the terms and conditions of the Scheme and constitute acceptance of a contract between the Department and the applicant who is responsible for the successful completion of all works.
- 31.2.11. The applicant and foresters are required to supply data in support of the Scheme to confirm involvement in forestry and the NeighbourWood Scheme and to enable the Department to process payment following the successful completion of all works.
- 31.2.12. Incorrect or incomplete data or failure to supply data may result in exclusion from the Scheme.

AUTOMATED DECISION MAKING:

- 31.2.13. Certain personal data provided in support of this Scheme will be processed automatically for the purpose of cross-checking personal details on the Departments Customer Care and Account systems to enable the processing of payments.

INFORMATION FROM THIRD PARTY:

- 31.2.14. Data supplied by Third Parties will be treated in the same manner as data supplied directly from customers.

CONTAIN TECHNICAL INFORMATION RE COOKIES POLICY AND COLLECTION AND USE OF TECHNICAL INFORMATION (SIMILAR TO THAT ALREADY ON WEBSITE):

- 31.2.15. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is fully committed to keeping all personal data submitted by its customers, fully safe and secure during administrative processes. All necessary technical measures have been put in place to ensure the safety and security of the systems which hold this data. Department staff are also considered as customers of the Department from a Data Protection perspective and may exercise their data protection rights in the same way.

32. Further Conditions

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

33. Forestry Act, 2014

- 33.1 All plantations 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 Department.
- 33.2 Applicants must also ensure that a valid felling licence is in place for any felling to be carried out under the NeighbourWood Scheme. Felling licence enquiries should be made to the Felling Section in Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford.

Annex 1

Grants and PES Premiums Payable

Element 1: Forest Enhancement

Projects are eligible for funding for approved works, up to a maximum of €6,000 euro / ha.
Individual applications to be no more than 12 ha in area.

Element 2: Forest Recreation Facilities

Projects are eligible for funding for approved works, up to a maximum of €4,200 / ha.
Individual applications to be no more than 12 ha in area.

PES Premium Payment

Private applicants under the NeighbourWood Scheme (Element 1: Enhancement and / or Element 2: Facilities) may be eligible for an annual payment of €90 / ha for 7 years, under PES 5 (People).

Annex 2

Guidance Notes for Completing the NeighbourWood Plan

- Every application under the NeighbourWood Scheme must be accompanied by a NeighbourWood Scheme Plan, completed in partnership with the local community and / or other user groups.
- As well as addressing key aspects required in order to facilitate DAFM in its assessment 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 NeighbourWood Plan template (available separately), addressing each part in turn. An electronic version of this template is available for download at is available for download on the Department's website.
- The NeighbourWood Plan must be developed by the Applicant and a 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.
 - 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, aquatic zones, relevant watercourses, hedgerows) should be indicated using colour-coding, and individual features (e.g. viewpoints, 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.
- The NeighbourWood Plan must be uploaded onto iNET as part of the application.



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