

Written evidence submitted by Andy Howard, Director Pennine Forestry Ltd (TPW0052)

Projects:

Doddington North – 256ha of mixed productive woodland planted in Northumberland between 2018 and 2020

Cacrabank – 186ha of mixed productive woodland planted in Scottish Borders 2019/20

Wester Deloraine – 208ha of mixed productive woodland being planted in Scottish Borders autumn 2020.

Langley Forest – 43ha mixed productive woodland application in County Durham. Went through WCPG process and currently awaiting grant award through WCF.

Mirfield - <2ha of broadleaf planting on a brownfield, flood plain site beside the River Calder in West Yorkshire, on the urban fringe. Stalled and unknown outcome or timescale for outcome.

The process for medium to large scale afforestation projects has improved immensely since the inception of the Doddington North project, initially facilitated by the original WCPG. The WCPG process has improved, and I believe IF applicants were to actually work with the system then it is useful and effective.

Too many applicants fight against the system though because they feel they know better and should be able to do what they want.

That there is a wide range of grant schemes available is a major problem. They have competing objectives and different payment rates, and applicants feel aggrieved that they can't get the objectives they want with the advantage of the payment rates that might be higher on other schemes. Hence the complaints that payment rates aren't high enough. The solution isn't to throw more money at the issue, the grant schemes and payment rates need a major simplification and to be co-ordinated.

A HUGE failing is the civil service infrastructure and IT support to the systems of delivery. The support and IT systems just aren't in place to deliver the schemes. For the simplest scheme, the WCF, I had to chase for payment on each claim, and ultimately complain to the highest level I could before the payment was pushed through the system.

Countryside Stewardship woodland creation is just a TOTAL SHAMBLES of administration. We have now been waiting six months for the capital grant payment on Doddington North, and all the RPA will tell us is that the IT systems can't cope with how to make the payment of the grant and they're trying to find a "work around"! It gives absolutely no confidence, or desire to do any more projects, when a grant scheme is put in place without the ability to actually deliver the payments that Government has signed contracts to make.

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