

Date 23 March 2018

Action Note 118

Plastics within the forest; a focus on tree protection

Advisory note:

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1 Purpose

This Action Note is to ensure that our advisers on woodland matters provide advice that considers the appropriateness of the use of plastics within the forest environment and the sustainable disposal of plastic products at the end of their productive life. Through this we will help deliver the government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) priority on minimising waste.

2 Background

The 25 YEP sets ambitious targets that forestry practice can make significant contributions to, see below:

25 YEP - Part 3: Minimising waste.

We will minimise waste, reuse materials as much as we can and manage materials at the end of their life to minimise the impact on the environment. We will do this by:

- working towards our ambition of zero avoidable waste by 2050
- working to a target of eliminating avoidable plastic waste by end of 2042
- meeting all existing waste targets – including those on landfill, reuse and recycling – and developing ambitious new future targets and milestones
- seeking to eliminate waste crime and illegal waste sites over the lifetime of this Plan, prioritising those of highest risk. Delivering a substantial reduction in litter and littering behaviour
- significantly reducing and where possible preventing all kinds of marine plastic pollution – in particular material that came originally from land

New government-led initiatives of relevance to forestry are starting to emerge. For example, the Environment Agency's new Plastics and Sustainability team will work with businesses, councils and community action groups across Devon and Cornwall to reduce plastic pollution.

3 Current position

This policy comes at a time when public awareness has been heightened by, for example, the BBC documentary Blue Planet II.

Plastic products in the forest environment are most usually used during woodland creation operations. Uses range from specialist bags containing young trees from the nursery through to tree protection, including spiral guards, tube and mesh shelters, leader protectors, cable ties, and temporary fencing. This list is not exhaustive.

There are several degradable products on the market that offer solutions that are part biodegradable, such as starch, but which also contain plastics that photodegrade in ultra violet light. This still leaves plastic residue in the forest as a dust. There are no reliable biodegradable solutions currently available.

UKWAS inspections on several sites have raised 'corrective actions' due to littering in the forest. In addressing corrective actions the following points must be considered:

- Litter or plastics removed from the forest are subject to [waste legislation and regulations](#)
- There are companies that will recycle these plastics, but it does require separation of differing plastics. It is up to the agreement holder to research their options

4 Action from advisers

In providing advice for the robust establishment of the trees we should include a consideration of how to minimise the amount of plastic required. The following questions provide a framework for doing so.

The use of plastics is optional within grant schemes, so ask:

- Does the woodland creation plan in the application address the use of plastics?
- Is tree protection required for successful establishment?
- What does the tree need protection from?
- Can fencing provide protection?
- Is further protection through a spiral required?
- Is further protection through a tree guard required?
- Does the silviculture of tree species to be protected benefit from a tree guard?

Once advice is given, and agreed, ensure the applicant understands that the agreement covers the end of use of the plastics, including adherence to current waste regulations.

5 Current grant funded protection options

Plastics are a significant component of some tree protection products, and consideration must be given to their disposal at the end of their life or use. [Table 1](#) shows the variety of protection methods currently grant funded when considering planting trees and woodland.

Table 1

Code	Capital items for use in Woodland Creation	Payment Rate	Aim	Additional notes	Mandatory or Optional?
TE4	Tree planting	£1.28/tree	To supply, plant and weed young trees and protect with a 0.6m spiral guard	Spiral not needed in some circumstances – this needs to be agreed with the Forestry Commission Woodland Officer	Mandatory in order to apply for Woodland Creation Grant
TE5	Individual tree shelter	£1.60/unit	To protect young trees with a tree shelter	This supplement can only be used with TE4. Shelter height to be agreed with Forestry Commission Woodland Officer	Optional
FG1	Fencing	£4/m	Method of stock control, to help habitat management or protect environmental features	This item can be used with the item TE5 where appropriate and agreed with the Forestry Commission Woodland Officer.	Optional
FG2	Sheep netting	£4.90/m	Exclude sheep to protect environmental features	This item can be used with the item TE5 where appropriate and agreed with the Forestry Commission Woodland Officer.	Optional
FG4	Rabbit fencing supplement	£2.50/m	Supplement to fencing (FG1), sheep netting (FG2), or deer fence (FG9) to exclude rabbits to help protect environmental features	<p>This supplement can only be used with one of the following capital items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ FG1 Fencing ■ FG2 Sheep Netting ■ FG9 Deer Fencing <p>This item can be used with the item TE5 where appropriate and agreed with the Forestry Commission Woodland Officer</p>	Optional

FG5	Fencing supplement - difficult site	£1.24/m	Supplement to fencing (FG1) to cover the extra costs of fencing on a difficult site	This supplement can only be used with one of the following capital items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ FG1 Fencing ■ FG2 Sheep Netting ■ FG9 Deer Fencing This item can be used with the item TE5 where appropriate and agreed with the Forestry Commission Woodland Officer	Optional
FG9	Deer fencing	£7.20/m	To protect newly created woodland from deer browsing	This item can be used with the item TE5 where appropriate and agreed with the Forestry Commission Woodland Officer.	Optional

The following two items have a stated requirement to dispose or recycle components as part of grant funding eligibility:

- TE4: Supply and plant treei
 - Remove the spiral and cane when no longer needed, and dispose of or recycle them in line with [waste legislation and regulations](#)
- TE5: Supplement for use of individual tree-sheltersii
 - Dispose or recycle tree shelters and stakes according to relevant waste disposal regulations

6 Sources of further advice

- <https://www.gov.uk/topic/environmental-management/waste>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>
- <https://www.charteredforesters.org/2018/03/plastic-with-a-purpose/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/waste-legislation-and-regulations>

7 Versions

Version 1 issued 9 March 2018

ⁱ [TE4: Supply and plant tree](#)

ⁱⁱ [TE5: Supplement for use of individual tree-shelters](#)