

## 2017/18 Statement on Sustainable Economic Growth

The Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) is in its third year; interest in the scheme continues to grow, with significant increases in applications to plant new woodland. Submitted applications to the scheme now have a combined value of £137 million, of which £110 million have received their grant contract. These applications will create 24,267 hectares of new woodland (18,960 hectares approved), as well as providing support for the management of existing forests. The final planting total for Scotland in 17/18 was 7,100 hectares of new woodland, which shows Scotland was responsible for 78% of new woodland creation in the UK.

Around 60 percent (over 4,000ha) was planted as productive woodland, specifically aimed at growing sustainable timber, with the remaining 40 percent increasing our native resource, this is the highest level of productive planting since 2000. The extreme winter weather disrupted planting in early 2018, with around 800 hectares of planting being held over until later in the year and too late to be included in the reporting period.

Being one of very few industries with a net carbon reduction, removing almost 13 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> each year in Scotland (Scottish Greenhouse Gas Inventory for 1991-2016), Forestry has been identified by Scottish Ministers as a key opportunity for further carbon reduction. This is why woodland creation targets have been increased and the Climate Change Plan lays out a stepped approach to reaching **15,000 hectares of new woodland creation** per year by 2025. This support for woodland creation has been backed up with resource, too, with an increase in budget for woodland creation from **£30 million to £34 million** for 2017/18. This signals significant political support for woodland creation and forestry in general.

We have seen an ongoing increase in the growth in timber harvesting in the last year and the forecasts look positive for this growth to continue. We recognise the challenges this brings to transport infrastructure and as such have continued the work of **The Strategic Timber Transport Fund**. We have also seen a boost of an additional £5 million being added to the budget taking the total budget to £7.85 million, so enabling delivery of additional projects which provide community, social and environmental benefits through the strengthening of public roads and reduced disruption by timber haulage.

Tree health remains a priority, with aerial surveys being undertaken across Scotland's forest areas. *Phytophthora ramorum* has been identified in new stands. However, over 80% of remaining larch in Scotland isn't showing visible signs of infection and so the current policy of early detection and robust action does appear to have been effective in slowing down and reducing the severity and scale of new outbreaks.

We cannot forget the importance of public engagement with tree health and the "Keep it Clean" campaign is now in its third year, continuing to develop our ability to inform members of the public and encourage them to brush off dirt and mud before every woodland visit in order to help maintain healthy forests.

Health and wellbeing is a key priority and our flagship health programme Branching Out referral programme brings together mental healthcare workers and outdoor staff to help

people recover from long-term mental health problems. Through a 12-week programme comprising of around three hours of woodland activities per week, Branching Out teaches participants about coping strategies to maintain positive mental health. The scheme is celebrating 10 years of delivery in 2018 with a total of 52 programmes being delivered across 9 health board areas with over 450 people referred. The scheme has 22 delivery partners whose staff are trained and supported centrally by Forestry Commission Scotland.

The Community Engagement programme enabling groups from diverse backgrounds access the opportunities that woods and forest offer engaged a total of 38 community groups in 2017-18 resulting in 3800 people attending events and activities. Education and Learning programme supported 139 early year's staff across 5 local authorities to complete Forest Kindergarten training and a total of 260 forest family bags were distributed to support woodland visits by children and their families.