

Future options for woodlots in Scotland

Anna Lawrence, 31 March 2021 [with final revisions 28 April 2021]

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1 Background and objectives

Scottish Forestry, through its Business Development team, wishes to support the development of a wider range of tenure arrangements to enhance access of a wider range of people and businesses to forest management. This is to further the policy goals outlined in Box 1. The approaches and experience of the Scottish Woodlot Association provide models for consideration, and a short piece of work was therefore commissioned to assess their experience, in the context of wider efforts to diversify tenure and local business engagement with woodland management.

Specifically the objective is to address the following questions:

- Is the woodlot concept a viable one for meeting the priorities of the SFS?
- Is it sufficiently different from the community woodland concept to be worth identifying and supporting as a separate group? If not then would it fit within the CWA (or other groups?)?
- If the woodlot concept is worth supporting then:
 - What is the best approach to creating and sustaining the new group?
 - Why would people want to become members of new group?
 - How would a new group “fit” with the old SWA?
 - What level of resources would be needed to establish a group and over what timescale

This study is based on eleven interviews, one group discussion conducted through Zoom, and a number of follow-up phone-calls, combined with review of relevant documents provided by the Scottish Woodlot Association, Forest Stewardship Council, and Forest Policy Group.

Note: It was made clear that this report is not intended for publication but rather to serve as a useful steer for moving forward, to be read and used by interested stakeholders. It has been written therefore with attention to functionality rather than providing a lot of background detail, quotations from interviews or description of existing woodlots. Some quotations are provided in illustration of points made; these are formatted in *italics*.

Box 1 Relevant policy priorities

Scotland’s Forestry Strategy 2019-2029 contains two priorities with supporting actions that are directly relevant to this piece of work.

Improving efficiency and productivity, and developing markets

- Supporting businesses of different types and scales to develop and grow markets for value-added wood products and forest tourism and recreation opportunities.
- Attracting new and more diverse talent to the forestry sector and improving the capacity, capabilities and safety of the existing workforce.

Engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests and woodlands

- Providing more opportunities for urban and rural communities to influence the decisions affecting their local forests and woodlands, including through increased community ownership.
- Supporting the provision of appropriate education and skills training to encourage wider participation in forest- and woodland-related employment.
- Encouraging a more diverse range of people to value and use forests and woodlands, particularly those close to where they live.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-forestry-strategy-20192029/>

2 Overview of experience

2.1 Experience of SWA

The Scottish Woodlot Association Ltd (SWA) was established informally in 2011 and formally as a cooperative on 7 June 2012¹ by a group of working foresters who were inspired by the Woodlot Licence forest tenure concept which is used in British Columbia, Canada. Their motivation focused on the challenge for ‘ordinary people’ to own woodland in Scotland². A maximum of ten woodlots have been established, with five currently functioning all in Dumfries and Galloway. Three of those are on the property of one landowner. Current woodlots are 5-39 hectares in size with an allowable annual cut up to 100 tonnes a year.

Membership has fluctuated and although concentrated in south-west Scotland there is still an active network of members across Scotland.

Core members and Directors have put in a great deal of effort in publicising and engaging interest including:

- a debate hosted by Aileen McLeod in the Scottish Parliament which attracted cross-party support.
- Articles in Scottish Farmer, Forestry Journal, BBC Radio Scotland as well as a great segment on Landward in 2018.
- Features in the press in British Columbia
- Case study in the UN Agricord Report Strength in Numbers in 2016.
- Hosted field visits from Padua University, the Reforesting Scotland Land Revival Tour (2018) and Federation of BC [British Columbia] Woodlot Associations.

The group also reports high levels of interest from Scottish Land & Estates who *‘got right behind it and we had literally dozens of landowners get in touch offering woodlands’* for Woodlot Licences throughout the project.

This strenuous effort by volunteers has resulted in considerable enthusiasm and awareness, and valuable accumulated experience. However despite interest shown by landowners and agents elsewhere, particularly Aberdeenshire and Perthshire, and time put in by members of the group (with FCS support), the group has ultimately struggled to formalise woodlot opportunities further from home. From a wave of enthusiasm and publicity, and reportedly waiting lists of landowners, there is only now a handful of woodlots all based in the south-west of Scotland.

Current members explicitly value their local ‘community of woodlotters’. *‘Having clusters helps. Like allotments. It’s part of the joy of it. You see each other.’* Additional benefits of local groups include local knowledge of potential woodlotters, landowners, and markets. There are some financial benefits but most reported ‘breaking even’. E.g.:

¹ Accounts etc. available at <https://mutuals.fca.org.uk/Search/Society/18986>

² Land ownership in Scotland is remarkably concentrated (Glass et al 2019). Comparison of forest ownership with Europe suggests that it is the most unequal distribution in Europe (Wightman, 2012). Change in that situation is difficult because land comes to market in large units and the price of (particularly forest) land is high and continues to rise (John Clegg and Co., 2019).

We're paying for land that had no income and the owners get improved woodland. There's no risk to the landowner. They are getting £250 for 15 ha. We're selling 100 tonnes of firewood at £3 / tonne [sic].

A valuable aspect of the SWA is their active approach to 'learning from experience' and adaptation. In total ten woodlot licences of various types were set up, mostly in Dumfries and Galloway. An early experimental one near Stranraer was considered a good experience but ultimately too far from the woodlotter's home; another in Fife has taken its own path separately from the SWA after a difference of opinion about management objectives. Possibly the most significant outcome is the fine-tuning of the woodlot licence as described in the next section. Initially the SWA acted as broker and intermediary between the landowner and the woodlotter, and the cooperative was set up for this purpose – to allow the SWA to lease woodlots and in turn sublet them to the woodlotter. The move to direct agreements between landowner and woodlotter was a change in function of the SWA, which all agree is a good outcome.

The current woodlots include one which is mostly clearing windthrow for firewood; one where the woodlotter is adding value by milling Douglas Fir; one where a family is restoring a neglected woodland to improve woodland quality and diversity; one where a horse-logger trains her horses.

The idea and the reality attract much enthusiasm:

- *it's one of my favourite things to do. We have very nice jobs but what I love best is being on the woodlot.*
- *It's important to emphasise in terms of operations, we cooperate and work [neighbouring woodlots] because the woods are next to each other. And we're friends with [other woodlotter] – they inspired me.*
- *I've got bits and pieces I can tinker about with, but it would be fantastic to get your own bit to manage for 10yrs.*

An important point made by several is that woodlot holders are less concerned with 'land reform' and changing ownership, than with a secure relationship with the land. *'Woodlotter don't care if they own the wood as long as they have right of access.'*

2.2 The Woodlot Licence

The woodlot arrangements are based on formal Woodlot Licence (WLL) agreements between the Woodlotter and the Landowner, including an agreed Woodlot Management Plan.

The WLL is central to the woodlot concept. The shape of the WLL, and process by which it is developed, have evolved through the 10 years of SWA experience. Initially SWA acted as broker and guarantor of the agreement but this proved onerous and stressful, and a simplified process has emerged, whereby SWA facilitates the WLL as a direct agreement between landowner and woodlot holder. The WLL is based on a template for standing timber sale, with replanting. incorporates management plan, map, calculation of annual allowable cut, and rental agreement as well as exclusions such as residence.

The SWA adopted the term 'woodlot licence' from British Columbia. The Canadian model has informed the Scottish model and the term gives the concept a certain distinctiveness. However it's important to note differences between the BC and Scottish contexts: in BC the model is led by the government, woodlot licences are awarded to individuals managing significant areas of forest owned by the Crown, and while management is innovative and often more environmentally friendly than

big commercial operations, the woodlot holder is basing his or her livelihood on the forest management. To date that is not the case in Scotland.

It's also clear that the terminology is more significant to some than others. The most recent woodlot agreement was arranged directly between the woodlot holders and BFT, and did not use the term 'woodlot licence'. Options are discussed below (section 3.4).

2.3 Constraints

The group has achieved a lot of publicity, gained valuable experience and established a cluster of woodlots in south west Scotland. At the same time they have experienced a number of serious challenges including the following.

1. The original model whereby SWA leased the woodlots proved very stressful. There are still considerable concerns among some members, about health and safety, insurance, and complying with contracts and standards. A major source of stress involved oversight and mechanisms for removing non-compliant woodlot holders from the scheme. It seems that this sense of responsibility by the SWA has ultimately made the experience rather stressful. There has been a move away from SWA acting as broker, which has reduced the stress, but there is a need to further clarify any need for oversight of contracts. The WLL itself should be legally watertight and not require supervision by a third party.
2. Furthermore the management of the SWA as a coop was described as 'a heavy organisation' and distracting from the happier activities of managing a woodlot. Its purpose as intermediary has been superseded. *One thing got in the road – bureaucratic stuff. There's a lot of that in our working lives, the last thing I wanted was to add another level.*
3. Some of these concerns relate to control of the concept. While some were anxious to ensure everything was carefully prescribed, others felt that '*Nobody is going to stop you calling it a woodlot*' and the concept could not be ringfenced.
4. Although the contractual basis of the WLL has evolved and current holders are content with it, others expressed concerns that it provided scope for ambiguity particularly about inadvertently conferring occupation or tenure rights.
5. Several stakeholders noted frustration about FLS's lack of interest or support for the idea, themes which were somewhat borne out by conversations with FLS staff.

2.4 Key lessons and moving forward

The ten years of voluntary and supported efforts by SWA have provided four key areas of learning: proof of concept, evolution of the contract basis and governance of the WLL, thoughts about the scale of the association and woodlotting communities, and what is possible with voluntary capacity.

What is now proving difficult is scaling up. After much effort in the past including many volunteer hours, current members have made it clear they don't have time or energy for making new connections. None of the current Directors want to continue in that role and they are in process of closing the cooperative.

In summary there is widespread enthusiasm for existing woodlots, the concept has been widely publicised and there is moral support for wider uptake. Further development is held back by the energy and time of volunteers, not by interest and imagination. The priority should be a development programme dedicated to scaling up, bringing together landowners and woodlot holders through a WLL in which the parties have confidence, and where there is no onus on a third party (such as a woodlot development programme) to monitor compliance.

3 Options

3.1 Future landowners

The success of the model depends on willing landowners and willing woodlotter. The landowners involved to date have come to the arrangement through personal contacts and word of mouth, often supported by significant efforts of SWA members. For example members travelled from Galloway to Aberdeenshire to explore options for new woodlots. The arrangement did not take off, reportedly because the land was too far from the potential woodlotter's home. SWA reports high levels of interest, and two unsolicited approaches have been made by landowners in the short period of this study.

An expanded programme will need to draw on existing expressions of interest and identify new landowning partners. There is some circularity here in that engaging new owners will depend on the objectives that woodlots are seen to fulfil. The current focus seems to accept that woodlots will always be on marginal land, and at best add one slender string to the livelihood bow. This perception can and should be challenged (see section 3.3).

Current woodlotter and other members of the SWA were optimistic that there were 'lots' of interested landowners, and interviews with landowners who had expressed interest reinforced this view. One said *'I'm amazed it hasn't come off more, it's a great idea and very simple.'* Some highlighted the potential for farm woodlands, and the need to work more specifically with farmers to promote the possibility. The agents interviewed for this study were keen to be part of a learning process.

Woodland agents have in the past taken their own initiative to develop and offer woodlots; an example described in Box 2 is impressive in its detail, attracted much interest from potential woodlotter, but ultimately failed because the Trust which owned the estate changed its priorities.

A contrasting focus emerged in discussions with Forestry and Land Scotland. Staff distanced themselves from objectives that enhance social diversity of those engaging in woodland management (taking the arguable view that current woodlotter are not diverse), and after some discussion decided that woodlots do not fit under land reform or community development goals. Instead staff saw more potential in developing business models that encouraged local long-term contracts, and which saw more engagement with local business and employment. They recognised that their current sales platform focuses on big industry and they are seeking to redress that. It is important to note that no promises were offered, and FLS's attitude was extremely cautious, emphasising that they are a 'trading agency' with expectations placed on them to manage commercially. However it is in this area of niche woodland management and products that there is some scope for meeting mutual objectives. In the most positive conversation the phrase 'it's not off the radar' was used.

Box 2. Example of potential woodlot proposed by owners

In late 2018 the agent for one Perthshire estate, inspired by articles and publicity about the SWA and woodlots concept, agreed with the owners to offer a woodlot. He prepared materials to advertise the opportunity (including through Reforesting Scotland and a local eco-camping business), and developed an outline description of the woodland and the criteria sought in a woodlotter.

The proposed woodlot area consisted of about 7 ha of mixed hardwoods planted in and since 1982, with some patchy establishment but generally good growth rates, and uneven competition between species. The details included access and current management arrangements including a Long Term Forest Plan for the whole Estate. The agent / owner indicated their long term management outcome as “an area of maturing oak woodland on a long rotation with an understorey of coppiced *Nothofagus* managed for firewood” and sought to work with a woodlot holder contributing innovative ideas on the management of the woodland.

The specification included

- an outline of operations (clearing windthrow, thinning, pruning, and removing dying Ash), and estimated AAC;
- indication of financial terms: fixed rental per annum based on £10/Tonne of firewood, with a rebate on the rental figure at the end of the lease term to reflect the successful establishment of Oak trees by the Woodlot Holder;
- technical challenges (heavily branched trees requiring competent certified operators to fell and process, windblown trees, access and extraction);
- skillsets and qualifications required including Health and Safety; certification for Chainsaw use would be at NPTC (or LANTRA equivalent) unit 301 (was CS32) (Fell trees over 38cm diameter), and the windblown trees would require NPTC 302 (was CS34) (Sever windblown trees); risk assessment and Lone Working protocol would also be required, together with full insurance cover and public liability; current first aid certificate appropriate to forestry operations is essential.

3.2 Future woodlotters

It seems that demand exceeds supply for woodlots, i.e. there are more potential woodlotters than landowners currently offering woodlots. There is a range of views on what a typical woodlotter might bring to the arrangement. While the original concept assumed a depth of forest management knowledge, and all the current woodlotters have relevant skills and experience, others including the woodland agents interviewed for this study felt that it is important to make opportunities available for people who have little experience of resource management but who are willing to learn and gain suitable qualifications and certificates. In order to attract a diverse range of woodlotters some thought will need to be given to ‘match-making’ processes.

The estate featured in Box 2 cast a wide net both in advertising broadly and encouraging a wide range of applicants:

While the proposed woodlot would suit someone with forestry experience, people with little experience but plenty of enthusiasm are encouraged to apply as collaborative working with skilled operators and a desire to learn can overcome inexperience.

This resulted in about 20 applications, which the agent thought was an excellent response. He noted that many ‘just liked the idea’, others ‘had done a bit but were not sure of H&S stuff’, and two who were ‘very good, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, had done a lot with volunteers.’ Unfortunately in this

case the owners changed their management objectives rather drastically and the woodlot idea was dropped. The lack of success was not a result of low interest.

3.3 Forest management and the business model

There is scope to develop the idea of woodlots as a business model. There are currently few expectations of the woodlots more doing financially than ‘paying for themselves’ on the grounds that no landowner would want to rent out commercially valuable forest to woodlot holders. Expansion depends on challenging this view.

Current woodlot holders see three main benefits to themselves: agreeable outdoor work (and family activity); provision of firewood; and small contribution to household income. There are variations - for some, income is more important than for others. However it’s important not to limit the application of the woodlot concept to small areas. *‘It’s not that we have a preference for marginal woodland!’*

Several interviews indicated an attitude that woodlots are unlikely to make (much) money, that landowners are unlikely to offer productive woodland for woodlots and that woodlot holders are not always serious small businesses. This view should and can be challenged. There are landowners who are explicitly interested in woodlots as a joint venture (see for example Box 3). There is growing interest in and experience of small woodland businesses (see for example the set of case studies produced by Forest Policy Group (<http://www.forestpolicygroup.org/case-studies/>)). An area of mixed woodland could be profitable if the woodlot holder was able to develop niche markets that the landowner did not have the time/resources or inclination to explore, and there is growing interest in coppice in Scotland.

There is another group of potential woodlot holders who are more interested in the opportunity to restore woodland ecology than to make money. For example,

Money? That’s not my aim. I’d like to adopt a PAWS restoration site. I would like to break even. Of course you could make money out of it depending on the woodlot that you end up getting. Once you’ve removed all the conifers you leave it to do its own thing. This would fit in really well with my self-employed work mix.

One area where more imagination would help to fulfil mutual objectives is in developing potential for woodlots on public land. FLS saw potential more in terms of ‘improving woodland management’ than in delivering social and community economic outcomes. They were cautious however about the scope to identify suitable areas of woodland, as there is no current list of the kinds of ‘marginal’ woodland sites that current woodlot holders see as appropriate. Areas in which there may be scope to develop new kinds of management contracts include management for non-wood forest products (such as mushrooms), and restoration of PAWS sites.

Box 3. Woodlots as joint business ventures

Discussions initiated by the agent for a landowner on a Scottish island indicate existing active interest in building on the woodlot concept in forests that are currently undermanaged with poor access to timber markets ('zero cost, zero profit'). The proposal is to select (say) four 10ha blocks and invite expressions of interest.

Key points include:

- The woodlot concept is attractive to the owner, who like most estates has multiple land management objectives; the primary objective is to get the woodland back into management and make it aesthetically attractive.
- The woodlot model is suitable for smaller blocks which the owner wants to bring back into management, reducing invasive species etc. Woodland management objectives might include woodfuel production, recreational / tourism / hospitality
- The owner is keen to work with people who have more time and energy and are thinking innovatively about woodland businesses
- The agent sees the existing woodlot licence model as a good basis for establishing the ground rules, covering annual allowable cut (AAC), health and safety conditions, and the values underpinning management objectives. He sees potential to build on this with a profit-share model based on development of enterprise such as camping, hutting etc., perhaps also looking at opportunities provided by the emerging natural capital market.
- The owner would be interested in a time period similar to existing farm business tenancy i.e. 10 years objectives

3.4 The licence

The original SWA sees the term 'woodlot licence' as core to the concept. As discussed above the meaning of the term is not so significant to others. A range of different contracts may be appropriate. However a collective identity could be good. On the national forest estate the term 'long term contract' is familiar but usually refers to 5-10 years, whereas the WLL concept would aim to apply over a longer period.

The current licence template is based on a standard standing sales contract. The landowners interviewed for this report took the view that something more legally robust was required. For example one said *'a standing sale is incredibly complicated, there are irrelevant bits. Things can go wrong – it can allow occupation. People are wary.'*

Public sector foresters were more keen to relate the WLL to their own concept of a 'long-term contract'. This idea could be developed to overcome concerns about tenure, but the merit in the woodlot concept lies in having a relationship with a woodland area over time. Without this engagement in woodland management, the concept is not innovative and does not address injustices in access to woodland tenure.

Overall however, discussions with a range of stakeholders indicate there is merit in maintaining the WLL term to highlight the difference between a **contract** to supply goods and services, a **licence** to deliver management outcomes, and a **lease or sale** which transfers decision-making powers away from the original owner. One respondent (a forest agent) commented: *'the term licence is helpful, it's seen as positive, recognised as a time-limited agreement'*.

While there is no exclusive copyright to the idea of a woodlot licence, people could copy it on a one-to-one basis and set up their own agreements. This development of a jointly agreed template for a Woodlot Licence, based on a contract that incorporated features recognised and accepted by agents, landowners and government land-owning agencies, could be part of the 'offer' provided by a new woodlot association in return for an annual fee. *'They need a legal document that they can believe in. For farmers, having a template contract that all parties could have confidence in would be useful.'* This call for something that had been 'tested' by legal advisors suggests that a licence template is a core task of the development programme.

3.5 Standards and certification

Members of the original SWA are currently developing ideas in collaboration with FSC, to explore a group certification scheme for woodlots. The intention is that this "would help the Woodlot Licences demonstrate the high standards we aim for and also could act as a gateway for Landowners and potential Woodlot holders to establish new Woodlot Licences."

While this is an interesting (even exciting) development, lack of certification is not an apparent constraint to the immediate expansion of woodlots. There is no evidence that landowners find the conditions of woodland management outlined in the WLL unsatisfactory – and therefore (so far) no immediate need to develop a group certification scheme.

The SWA / former SWA discussion on this has perhaps moved on. Originally the view was expressed that *'membership of association would require forest certification as part of membership'* but not all current woodlot holders see a need. The potential woodlot described in Box 3 is already part of a certified estate and *'managed to meet the UK Woodland Assurance Standard, and this imposes standards on operations that need to be taken on board by the potential Woodlot Holder.'*

This is a separate issue from the requirement for woodlot holders to have appropriate qualifications. Several respondents pointed out this is already a standard part of their work. *'I have to fill out all sorts of forms just to get on a site. I need to know whoever is doing it has a level of expertise and skills that they need to do the job they say they are going to.'*

3.6 Organisation

The current SWA cooperative is in process of closing. It achieved recognition and proof of concept for the woodlots idea in Scotland, but ultimately Directors and members have become exhausted, understandably reluctant to take on admin, and without capacity to take on employee / training / project or financial management.

There is discussion about creating a new woodlot association. Although the old cooperative is being wound up, there appears to be interest in establishing a new national organisation. Functions would include advocacy, sharing experience, and partnering with the host of the new development programme. Co-operative Development Scotland have offered to support former SWA directors in doing this, although the new members will have to give full consideration to whether it should be a coop or not. Discussion has focused on three issues:

1. Should the association be national or regional? Or have local 'branches'? interest in local aspects is based on current appreciation for a local 'community of practice'. It is also related to ideas about eligibility for community windfarm benefit funds. However it is unclear what such funding would be needed for.

2. Membership. Whether membership is two-tier – including woodlot holders paying an annual licence fee, and individual or supporter members paying a lower membership.
3. Certification. Current ideas are discussed in section 4.9. On-going discussions with FSC mention setting up 'set up a new co-op for a group scheme'.

There currently seems to be uncertainty about the form and purpose of a new woodlot association. This is one of the reasons why this report recommends delivery of a support programme through an umbrella/ intermediary organisation. A membership association would be a valuable vehicle for developing the sense of identity and community that has already been initiated by the SWA. It would also be the strongest organisational mode for sharing experience, developing a community of practice and hosting training. This development cannot easily be prompted by external support.

There is enthusiasm for a role of project officer, hosted by a partner organisation as discussed in the next section.

3.7 Support programme

Reflections with members of the SWA indicate a strong welcome for the suggestion of a project officer. *A development officer 'would be brilliant'. It could turn into a full time job. It has such potential.*

Furthermore, rather than burden an exhausted current SWA, or a newly emerging association, with requirements for financial, contract and employment management, it is proposed that this project officer be hosted by a partner organisation, in a similar way to that modelled by the Woodland Crofts Partnership, anchored by the Communities Housing Trust. The current state of flux indicates that any funding for support should initially be channelled through a partner organisation, with a view to potentially transferring the role of project officer to the new woodlot association over a period of (say) 2-4 years. The partner / programme host could be an umbrella organisation, one that already does advisory and administrative support for small scale and / or community woodlands. Organisations which already do this include for example the Community Woodland Association, Borders Forest Trust, Association of Scottish Hardwood Sawmillers, Falkland Centre for Stewardship, Reforesting Scotland or possibly a private consultancy / forest agency.

While a partnership is highly desirable, the development programme is the top priority. It is most important to address the current constraints to woodlot development, provide technical and administrative support and build the numbers and geographic spread. The emergence of a new association cannot be forced or rushed. This arrangement allows for progress while interested parties clarify how they want to proceed.

3.8 Training

One perhaps erroneous perception of the wood-lotting movement is that it is only available to those with existing forestry skills (chainsaw certificates, woodland management experience etc.). This is not necessarily the case and it was striking that the Perthshire example (Box 2) proactively encouraged applicants who did not necessarily have all the experience and qualifications and offered to support them to gain the necessary skills, certificates and insurance.

In any case, even forestry professionals need continuing professional development.

If sufficient demand is built up, this is a key area of support that could be delivered through the proposed development programme, in partnership with a new woodlot association. Areas

highlighted as possible training needs include chainsaw use, health and safety, bat surveys. These could be offered individually and / or covered with more comprehensive training such as FISA Forest Works Manager.

3.9 Sustainability

Initial funds are needed to expand the number, types and geographic spread of woodlots, and to build up a community of practitioners and documentation of the benefits. While there are precedents for continued government support for initiatives that deliver on the Scottish Forestry Strategy (e.g. ASHS, CWA) it could also be possible to establish a self-sufficient support service, by developing a rotating fund. The original model of woodlot included an annual fee of £100 to the SWA, and current woodlot holders do not seem to find this onerous (although the fee is not currently being collected). One person's vision was: *If you have 500 woodlots paying £100/yr suddenly you have [funds for] 1.5 persons.* Another (landowner) commented *'the fee is extremely modest'*.

Because woodlots are (albeit small) businesses, this approach has feasibility. However it would have to be clear what the annual fee was paying for. The desire of woodlot holders to focus on woodland not admin is a key part of this. A point commonly made was: *'Paperwork massively decreases enjoyment. We have no problem selling stuff.'*

It could be seen as 'paying it forward' to continuing advisory support, on the basis that such support was received by current woodlot holders to establish their own licences and management plans. The situation is not entirely clear-cut for two reasons:

1. interviews with agents suggested that they might expect to develop and deliver the management plan (thereby bypassing the need for substantial input by a woodlot project officer);
2. it is difficult to see how the idea of woodlots could be claimed as unique to the woodlot development programme, or to a new woodlot association;
3. there is currently no active woodlot association.

This is an area which needs to be tested, but the constraints are not insurmountable. One agent highlighted that most landowners, particularly small estates and farmers, would not have their own forest agent and would welcome a service to develop the licence contract.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Responses to the brief

In response to the questions posed by the brief:

- *Is the woodlot concept a viable one for meeting the priorities of the SFS?*

The concept is viable, but to expand beyond its current geographic focus it needs support as the current advocates and practitioners are overstretched in trying to do this in voluntary capacity. Those who are most supportive see it as providing public benefit primarily in terms of delivering better woodland management, which although not explicitly stated as an SFS priority, does relate to improving productivity. While woodlots certainly do contribute to 'different types and scales to develop and grow markets for value-added wood products' they should be seen as a vehicle for this rather than the unaided means of delivery.

There is scope to do more to support woodlots to contribute to developing markets. Woodlots are 'Attracting new and more diverse talent to the forestry sector' but again without support this is currently very limited and attracting mostly those already with some professional link to the sector. The Association (and any follow-up) has good potential for 'improving the capacity, capabilities and safety of the existing workforce.'

On the second priority highlighted in the brief (see Box 1) on engaging people, communities and businesses: woodlots are opportunities for *members* of local communities to influence woodland management, rather than communities per se. And as noted in the previous paragraph, the SWA is a demonstrated channel for 'supporting the provision of appropriate education and skills training to encourage wider participation in forest- and woodland-related employment'.

- *Is it sufficiently different from the community woodland concept to be worth identifying and supporting as a separate group? If not then would it fit within the CWA (or other groups?)?*

The woodlot concept is not a community woodland concept. Woodlot holders are individuals or families; they do not fit any legislative definition of community of place or interest, and earlier confusion between woodlots and community woodlands has probably undermined their value. More useful would be to focus on the role of woodlots in the local economy, and in supporting diverse and sustainable businesses.

If the woodlot concept is worth supporting then:

- *What is the best approach to creating and sustaining the new group?*

Given the current rethink taking place in the original SWA, and in the wider context of strong interest and enthusiasm for the woodlots concept, the current priority should be to build up the number and geographic spread of woodlots. The new woodlot group should emerge from the community of woodlot holders rather than be expected to deliver that community in the first instance. Therefore it is proposed that a woodlots development programme is supported in tandem with the growth of a new woodlots association.

- *Why would people want to become members of new group?*

In the same way that other membership associations (e.g. ASHS, CWA) do, a new woodlot association would provide a sense of community, mutual sharing of experience, and where feasible support the development of local groups of woodlot holders. In order to support the association to gain capacity and credibility it would be important to see it as the first option for delivery of training courses.

- *How would a new group "fit" with the old SWA?*

As noted above, a 'new' group would most usefully emerge in tandem with a growing community of woodlot holders. The commitment, enthusiasm and experience of members of the 'old' group is essential to the current vision and continuity is needed as well as new membership with wider geographic coverage. There are two issues which need attention however. It is not clear however what value is served by being constituted as a cooperative. And the strong sense of identity and ownership of the 'old' group is inspiring but might also be seen as somewhat exclusive to newcomers. Careful attention to balancing continuity and welcoming new blood would be valuable.

- *What level of resources would be needed to establish a group and over what timescale*

The resources would best be channelled into a development programme hosted by a third party, not into establishing the group. The development programme would include support for training events which could be hosted by a new woodlots association.

The suggested resource level assumes that some initial preparatory work is needed, and that the programme would grow, but aim to develop a sustainable rotating fund. An outline of suggested work is provided in the final section of this report.

4.2 Keeping the components clear

In moving forward it is helpful to identify the different components of a woodlot expansion programme and the relationships between them.

1. The (new) **membership association**: a membership organisation will help to give the woodlots concept and practitioners a collective identity and continuity with the important founding story. This new organisation would not be expected to employ staff, nor host and administer significant grants; rather it should be recognised that Directors are acting in a voluntary capacity with many other demands on their time. Conversely, neither should it be expected that adopters of woodlot licences are expected to take up compulsory membership of the membership association, but they would be encouraged to do so. There could two tiers of membership (like CWA) – individual and woodlotter.

If the membership organisation sees fit and there are sufficient new woodlots paying fees, over the course of several years there could be a handover from the development programme to a self-sustaining advisory team hosted ultimately by the membership organisation. This would depend on sufficient uptake of woodlotter paying an annual fee into a fund ringfenced for advisory work.

To function in this partnership role and ultimately take on the sustainability of the programme, it is essential that such an association is a national (Scottish) organisation, not a local one, although local clusters could well be encouraged to form within it.

2. **Support programme**. To scale up the number and geographic spread of woodlots requires technical and administrative support which in turn requires initial financial support. The support programme would employ or contract a project officer working 20-30 days in the first year. There should be an exit strategy or evaluation criteria for continuing to fund based on delivery of public benefit and objectives of the SFS.
3. **Host** for support programme. For the reasons already outlined, a new woodlot association should not be expected to host the support programme initially. The host organisation needs experience in forest management, financial and project management, and employment / contract management.
4. **Woodlot Licence**. A template as outlined above, which is recognised by all stakeholders as legally grounded, should be developed by the support programme. Ownership of the WLL could pass to the new membership association if a working partnership, rotating fund and handover programme develop successfully.
5. **Certification programme**. This is an interesting development supported by FSC. In order to avoid confusion between the woodlot licence and optional certification, the latter should be handled by the (new) woodlot association not the support programme. There would have to be communication between them about it as an optional extra.

4.3 Recommendations for support programme

1. A woodlot development programme should be hosted by an existing larger organisation with established financial management, employment, project management and woodland management skills. The host would partner, through the development programme, with an emerging woodlot association, but in the first year at least, and possibly for several years, employment and programme delivery would sit with the host / umbrella / partner organisation.
2. Objectives. In the first year the support programme should aim to:
 - a. identify interested landowners and woodlot holders, and work towards bringing them together through the following activities;
 - b. develop a WLL template which meets the needs of the range of landowner types and woodlot holders;
 - c. develop a new (or possibly the existing SWA) webpage including sample contract (WLL) and simple case studies showcasing what is possible;
 - d. establish 20 new woodlots distributed across Scotland;
 - e. examine options for establishing a rotating fund based on woodlotting fees, and where possible establish the fund;
 - f. develop a profile of qualifications required for woodlot holders, and identify suitable training opportunities; develop a training plan;
 - g. establish working relationship with founders of the woodlot concept, particularly to build on political capital and social networks, and to make use of learning from experience;
 - h. develop partnership with new woodlot association as and when that emerges; where possible deliver training through the new woodlot association;
 - i. maintain discussion about certification as a learning opportunity and optional add-on for contracts.
3. Taking into consideration this list of objectives, an initial fund of £10 000 would not be excessive. Continuing support would be needed while or until a rotating fund and organisational capacity of the membership association is established. It might be possible to aim for £8k funding in year 2, with the programme part funded by fees from new woodlots.
4. It is not explicitly recommended that financial support be provided directly to a new membership association as the shape of such an association will depend on the combined views and efforts of members. However some indirect funding could be made available through earmarking part of the woodlot development funding for training courses, which could be promoted and delivered through the new membership association. To avoid placing a burden of employment or significant financial management on the new association, such delivery would initially be covered through budget managed by the partner organisation which hosts the development programme.

5 References

Glass, Jayne, R. Mc Morran and Steven Thompson 2019. The Effects Associated with Concentrated and Large Scale Land Ownership in Scotland: A Research Review. Report prepared for Scottish Land Commission March 2019. 40 pp.

John Clegg and Co. 2021. UK Forest Market Report 2020. Available at <https://rural.struttandparker.com/publication/uk-forestry-market-report-2020/>

Wightman, Andy 2012. Forest Ownership in Scotland. A Scoping Study. Available at: http://www.andywightman.com/docs/ForestOwnershipScotland_2012.pdf. 29pp. Forest Policy Group.

Appendix 1: media links to existing material about woodlots in Scotland

Scottish Parliament in 2013 which supported this new form of tenure in Scotland:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eO9_KOJoRuU

United Nations FAO Agricorn report from a few years ago which features and supports Woodlot Licences in Scotland within a global context (see pages vii & 21/22)

<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/418854/icode/> UN FAO report is downloadable here:

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5765e.pdf>

Scottish Land & Estates: <https://www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk/helping-it-happen/case-studies/community-nine-centuries>

Federation of BC Woodlot Associations (page 6) https://woodlot.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/almanac/almanac_2013_fall.pdf

Reforestation Scotland's Land Revival Tour <https://reforestingscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/A-Living-From-the-Forest.pdf>

Radio and TV features such as Border TV and Landward on BBC1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUo5IraLyL4>

Appendix 2: current description of Scottish Woodlots

[draft text produced by current members for use in relation to development of a group certification scheme]

A Woodlot Licence is a tenure agreement which enables a local person to manage an area of woodland. Woodlot Licences offer the opportunity of a new form of forest land tenure for Scotland's forests. They give local people the opportunity to manage forests themselves in a small scale and sustainable way, and are a practical and proven way of bringing Family Forestry to Scotland. We have worked tirelessly as volunteers to establish Woodlot Licences over the last ten years and the group has members across Scotland. Receiving support from British Columbia where Woodlot Licences originated, cross party support from the Scottish Parliament, and support from Forestry Commission Scotland, several Woodlot Licences have been set up across Scotland. Our Woodlot Licences were featured on BBC One Scotland's Landward TV show in 2018, and through support from the International Family Forestry Alliance we were included in the UN FAO Agricorn report Strength in Numbers in 2016. As a group of volunteers we have reached the point that we see that the concept of Woodlot Licences has been proven and we see Forest Certification as a next step in the evolution of the project. We feel this would give a practical structure to underpin the project based on high standards, and financial support of this would help more Woodlot Licences be setup as well as supporting and consolidating existing Woodlot Licences. To share the success and social community benefit and social capital that will benefit local people as a whole and promote the Green Recovery we hope you can support Woodlot Licences for Scotland and family forestry particularly in the current climate.

Experience from Caerlaverock

“For our family the benefits of having our Woodlot have been huge. For my husband it has provided a wealth of opportunity to manage a woodland himself that we could never have afforded to buy. It enables Andrew to practice his chainsaw skills and small scale forestry management. Previously, the woodland had not been managed for 15 years; the Woodlot licence brought it back into management and produces all our firewood, with a sustainable allowable annual cut.

“For myself as a primary school teacher I was initially daunted by my lack of forestry knowledge, but together we have learned and grown together as a family as the Woodlot has developed.

“Particularly in the current climate in lockdown, our Woodlot has provided the children with a creative space to explore different projects with the added freedom as stakeholders.

“Our Woodlot continues to provide an important space for our family, while offering exciting opportunities to develop further.”

Experience from Corehead

“Corehead woodlot has given two friends the opportunity to manage a series of woodland areas on behalf of the Borders Forest Trust, with the main aim to bring all areas back round to native broadleaf planting. This will help boost future biodiversity at Corehead as well as providing firewood for the families of both Woodlotter and allows us to manage woodlands to a professional standard that we would not be able to afford to buy.”

Appendix 3: comparison of woodlots and woodland crofts

[graphic courtesy of Jamie McIntyre, Woodland Crofts Partnership]

Comparison between Woodland Crofts and Woodlot Licences

	Woodland Croft	Woodlot Licence
Location	Crofting Counties only (+ areas designated by Scottish Ministers)	Anywhere in Scotland
Tenure	Ownership or lease	Lease only
Security of tenure	Yes	No
Duration (of lease)	Lifetime	Fixed term, but can be renewed
Right to Buy	Yes, but usually withheld from new crofts	No
Regulation	Subject to Forestry & Crofting legislation	Subject to Forestry regulation
Residency requirement	Yes – within 20 miles	No
Housing	Yes, subject to planning approval	No
Compensation for improvements	Yes	No
Rights to timber – existing trees	Belong to landowner Made available to tenant in various ways	Belong to landowner Made available via Allowable Annual Cut
Rights to timber – restock/regeneration	Belong to the crofter	Belong to the landowner