



FOREST SERVICE

# Business Plan 2020/2021



Department of  
Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

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# Chief Executive Foreword



I am pleased to present the Forest Service Business Plan for 2020/21. This Plan sets out the priority work areas and associated targets for the agency, as we work through the EU Exit transition period and direct our services in support of the Minister's focus on Green Growth and the Executive's Covid-19 recovery plans. I have agreed 8 key targets with the Minister and set a further 14 supporting targets to deliver on the policy aims for forestry and plant health.

I recognise that our targets for this business year are particularly challenging and especially as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact in many ways on all our lives. Forest Service, like all public bodies and private businesses, has had to re-focus its services and determine which are truly essential and can best contribute to the needs of society in these unprecedented times. Already, as I write this plan, I have seen the extreme value that people attach to visiting our forests and accessing our many services in these daunting times.

The 'Forests for our Future' afforestation programme, announced by the Minister in March, is undoubtedly a priority work area in this business plan. The programme means working across government departments, and encouraging and supporting private landowners to plant 18 million trees to create 9,000 hectares of new woodland over the next decade, to contribute to climate change mitigation and the many other benefits that forests provide. This year we will assist other departments in drawing up plans for planting suitable public land and launch revised and new forestry grant schemes to promote greater uptake by private landowners.

The Department's 'Green Growth' strategy, announced by the Minister in a statement to the Assembly in June, incorporates 'Forests for our Future' as one of its foundation initiatives. Additionally, this business plan seeks to quantify the scope to improve forests' contribution to a net zero carbon economy envisaged in 'Green Growth'.

Making new plant health legislation and putting in place official controls to protect our plant health status and enable continued trade and economic growth, from the end of the EU Exit transition period, 31 December 2020, is also a key and significant work programme. We will work with our colleagues in UK Government and ROI in developing operable frameworks and with traders to streamline the implementation of necessary controls.

Forest Service's trading activity level is recognised, from 1 April 2020, by the Office of National Statistics through the classification of a Public Non-Financial Corporation. In this context, Forest Service plans this year to continue to supply approximately 400,000 tonnes of timber to industry for added value processing within the local economy. The agency has targets for this business year to achieve at least £10M from the sale of timber and a further £1M from provision of recreation and other estate activity.

I greatly appreciate the enormous contribution that Forest Service staff are making to keep our important services active, while they also deal with anxieties and pressures from Covid-19 in their personal lives. I am committed to safe working arrangements for staff and to supporting them through Covid-19 recovery as we fulfill our business plan targets. I will provide opportunities and encourage staff to acquire additional skills to undertake new tasks as we strengthen those work areas where we find services are in highest demand.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Joe O'Boyle". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John Joe O'Boyle  
**Chief Executive**



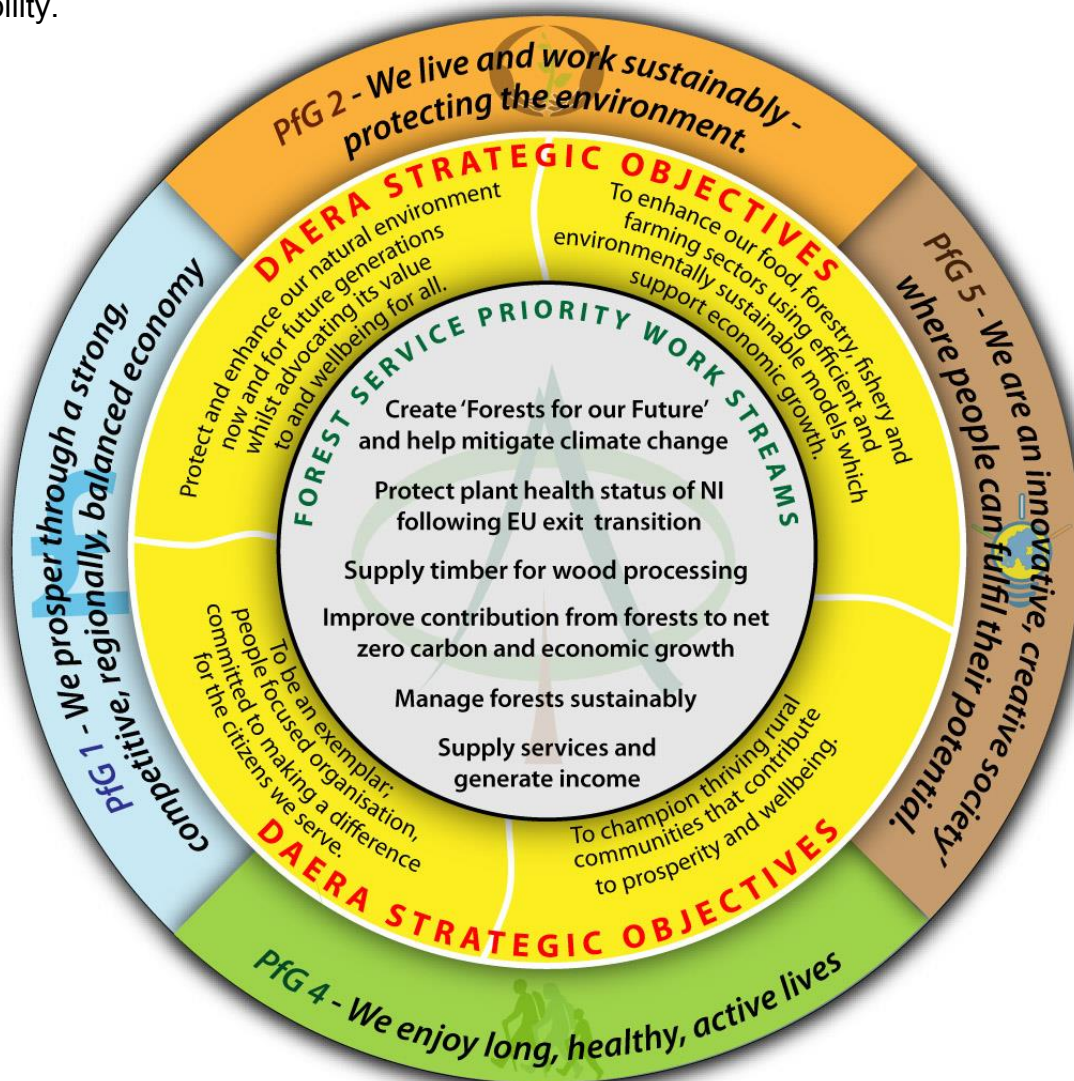
# Purpose & Status

Forest Service delivers forestry and plant health functions on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). Forest Service operates as an Executive Agency since 1 April 1998 and received an administrative classification as a Non-Financial Public Corporation, which came into effect from 1 April 2020. The agency is subject to the overall direction of the Minister, who determines the policy framework within which it operates, the scope of agency activities and the resources available for its work.

# Vision & Aims

Forest Service's work substantially supports: the Department's vision of **'Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone'**; the Strategic Outcomes in the DAERA business plan; and contributes to the working draft Programme for Government (PfG).

Forest Service work streams are aligned to the Department's strategic objectives, its vision for 'Green Growth' and its programme delivery in the context of the PfG Strategic Outcomes including **'We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment'**, for which DAERA has lead responsibility.



# Functions

Forest Service fulfils DAERA's legal obligations in the areas of forestry, plant health and seed potato certification.

Our key tasks are:

**1** To promote forest expansion through grant aid under the Rural Development Programme;

**2** To promote partnership working on forestry lands by formalising agreements to supply timber, provide access and enhance biodiversity;

**3** To provide a regulatory framework as part of the UK Plant Health Service and processes to encourage compliance with forestry, and plant health legislation, aid scheme rules and potato seed certification and forest reproductive material schemes;

**4** Monitor compliance and enforce legislation through inspection programmes, and protect the productivity capacity of agriculture and forestry lands by monitoring for the presence of organisms harmful to plants;

**5** To manage the Department's forests so as to:

- Supply timber, regenerate and protect forests;
- Promote public access by maintaining and improving facilities and visitor services through partnership working with local councils and others;
- Verify sustainable management performance through a process of independent audit against the UK Woodland Assurance Standard;
- Determine the sustainability of plantations on peat soils taking account of carbon and climate change implications and other ecosystem services they provide.

# Strategic Context

The Agency Framework Document sets out the context for our work on forestry and plant health consistent with the Department's vision for 'Green Growth' and strategic outcomes set out in the DAERA Strategic Plan. Increasingly, we are working with partners to deliver services because they are often better placed to do so than ourselves, and this allows us to focus on regulation, strategic planning and the technical aspects and control of forest management.

The approach to land use within the agriculture sector continues to impact on the opportunity for afforestation, but with increased public awareness to climate change including a UK 'carbon neutral' target by 2050, there is a renewed momentum behind environment-focused programmes including afforestation. This year we will continue to promote forest expansion under the NI Rural Development Programme, advising the public and private sectors alike through economic modelling and land use studies, which inform policy and support landowners to consider forestry options on both public and private land.

Increasing forests in NI will require the forestry sector to engage in developing policies in agricultural and environmental land use in a post-EU economy. Landowners will need to be encouraged to provide benefits from increasing forests, for example to contribute to economic activity; flood alleviation; public access and other non-timber eco-system services. We will provide advice on creating and managing forests and financial support to assist woodland creation. Our stocks of growing timber can support commercial timber processing, and underpin resilience and confidence in the sector to invest for the future.

Making new plant health legislation and putting in place official controls to protect our plant health status and enable continued trade and economic growth, from the end of the EU Exit transition period, December 2020, is also a key and significant work programme. Forest Service provides official inspection services that aim to balance effective regulation while minimising the regulatory burden on industry and trade. Its work facilitates trade by advising industry on best practice and international standards.

Following the EU Exit on 31 January 2020, we have continued to plan as part of the UK Plant Health Service for the effective delivery of plant health controls to facilitate trade in regulated goods, and protect our plant health status under a common framework. This includes the preparation for potential scenarios that may be required in the implementation of the NI protocol by the end of the transition period, which currently expires 31 December 2020. We continue to have a common interest in plant health matters with our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland and continue to collaborate on plant health policies and legislation to support the maintenance of the single epidemiological status of the island.

It is in this context that we will:

- Protect and promote forestry, to increase the natural capital of forests to deliver a sustainable programme of forest ecosystem services;

- Strengthen our approach to forest planning so that we are better able to identify the potential for forestry to contribute to land-use change in a post-EU membership economy, predict forest growth, and mitigate the effects of changing climate and other external impacts on forestry;
- Maintain independent certification of state forests;
- Safeguard the plant health status of our land-based industries through implementation of the EU 'Smarter Rules for Safer Food' legislation including Plant Health Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 while new trade relationships under any future economic partnership emerge. During the period of EU Exit transition to a future economic partnership we will mitigate the most significant risks to plant health and promote the adoption of better bio-security principles by professional operators and the wider public in support of the maintenance of plant health on the whole island;

The agency's targets for the forthcoming year reflect the need to safeguard the NI plant health status, extend forest and woodland, supply sustainable timber to industry, and earn over £10 million from forestry resources. The agency will continue to safeguard its staff while maintaining productivity by reducing absenteeism and accidents, and will seek out opportunities for investment to improve and extend the life of assets.

To achieve this we will engage in partnership working on forestry land to supply timber to wood processors, to develop public access and improve recreational provision in support of health and well-being benefits and the tourism economy. In safeguarding plant health and the environment we will work with environmental NGOs, trade representative bodies, and the public. We will underpin the knowledge base about forestry and plant health by working with the academic community.



# Operating Environment

## **Forests for our Future**

On 2 March 2020, the Minister made a statement in the Assembly on the 'Forests for our Future' programme for afforestation. The programme places sustainability at the heart of the policy aim to expand tree cover to 12% by the middle of the century and falls firmly within the Department's vision for 'Green Growth'. In the upcoming year, we will work both independently and through an Afforestation Forum of senior officials and policy makers to deliver continued afforestation in the short term but also to publish plans for ongoing planting on public lands in the medium to long term. Our target for afforestation in the coming year has increased 67% on last year to 500ha of new woodland, which reflects our commitment to delivering on this vision.

Increased tree planting has been proven to help mitigate climate change, enhance landscapes and biodiversity as well as improving the health and well-being of those that enjoy the natural resource; and our Minister has written to other Ministers and Chief Executives of local councils to seek their support and commitment to make public land available for tree planting. This is seen as key to addressing the single greatest obstacle preventing tree planting, land availability. While we will continue to look for opportunities to acquire lands in 2020/21 for afforestation purposes, prospective sites are often expensive and may not represent value for money. This new approach will target those land areas, which are already publically owned, and will seek to repurpose them for tree planting.

Targets for the new business year have also be set to provide for those private sector land holders who wish to plant trees through a sixth phase of the Forest Expansion Scheme. This will be augmented through a further supporting target to open a new small woodlands grant scheme, aimed at including those landholders who have smaller sites, 0.2ha and greater, available for planting.

With increasing focus on environmental issues and the recognition of tree planting as a 'simple, low cost option' to remove carbon from the atmosphere by the Committee on Climate change; we will place significant emphasis on afforestation policy in the upcoming year.

## **Maintaining plant health status of NI following EU Exit transition**

Plant health is at the heart of NI's thriving natural environment, our rural economy and our wellbeing. However, there are increasing pest and disease threats to our plant health, particularly through increased globalisation of trade and other factors such as climate change. It is therefore critical to safeguard our agriculture, horticulture, forestry and the wider environment from plant pests and diseases.

The UK exiting the EU impacts on Northern Ireland plant health controls and the on the role of Forest Service in ensuring our current plant health status is maintained and improved. As set out in the NI Protocol, NI remains aligned to the EU and will continue to implement EU Plant Health policy and legislation retaining, updating and implementing the EU legislative framework. However, as a result of EU exit the UK will implement a UK Plant Health policy and legislative framework to secure the operation of the UK internal market. This dual approach will require Forest Service to implement both the EU and UK frameworks for plant health controls and while both frameworks deliver the EU Smarter Rules for Safer Food regime, separate legislation is required to implement official controls under each. Whilst continuing to deliver in accordance the existing EU framework, the mechanisms for implementing the UK framework will be agreed through the UK Plant Health Common Framework, which will establish joint working arrangements between the Devolved Administrations and DEFRA under the new approach.

In the 2020/21 business year, Forest Service have set targets to have effective plant health legislation and official controls in place, to implement both the EU and UK Plant Health Frameworks by 31 December and to maintain and protect our plant health status in the post EU exit transition period. This requires all EU legislation to be updated and our Northern Ireland Statutory Rules amended to give effect to the post EU Exit requirements.

## **Improving the contribution from forests to net zero carbon and economic growth**

In the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, extensive plantations were planted in upland areas that were seen as barren and unproductive. Much of this planting was on peat soils, which were drained for the purpose, and now account for approximately 58% (36,000ha) of the Forest Service managed woodland. By the early 1990's Government commitment to conserving biodiversity through international agreements and legislation, including the UN 'Earth Summit' (1992), and Habitats Directives (1992), resulted in development of forest policy, which presumed against further afforestation of peatland that was recognised as a globally threatened habitat. At present, Forest Service woodland on peat soils consists of mostly Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine plantation with the resulting timber harvest from these areas accounting for approximately 40% of Forest Service's annual timber production for the homegrown timber processing market. As well as producing timber, as these forests grow they sequester atmospheric carbon to mitigate climate change and provide

important biodiversity benefits e.g. 20 % of the Forest Service estate, most of which is on peat soils, are designated as Special Protection Areas for hen harrier and/or merlin. The forests also provide public access for recreation and tourism in the uplands and help regulate the water environment in relation to flood protection.

The effects of conifer planting on peat bog carbon storage in Northern Ireland are poorly understood and studies are required that quantify the loss of carbon from the peat and evaluate it against the accumulation of carbon above and below ground in trees, also taking account of the time which carbon is stored in wood products. In 2020/21 Forest Service, in collaboration with Forest Research, will publish an outline assessment of the greenhouse gas implications of existing forests on peat soils to help determine their sustainability. The output of this work, in addition to consideration of other ecosystem services provided by these plantations, will inform decision-making around which these plantations will be restocked following harvesting or will be restored as far as possible to their previous state.

## **Manage forests sustainably and provide access for people to enjoy recreational, health & well-being benefits, supporting tourism recovery**

Our principal obligation is to ensure that forests are managed in a sustainable manner. As evidence of this, our sustainable forest management practices remain compliant with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS), confirmed through an independent audit accredited by Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) (Licence Code: FSC-C084232) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC) (Licence Code: PEFC/16-40-1924). Last year we undertook a procurement exercise to ensure that a full re-assessment audit took place in sufficient time to allow certification to extend seamlessly beyond May 2020. Compliance with the requirements of UKWAS means, broadly, that forest management complies with all legal obligations and is committed to a rigorous planning process that pays proper attention to the needs of people and public values in the design of forests at all stages of development. Forest Service ensures that forest operations comply with the plans and follow good practice; that forests are properly protected and maintained; and that conservation and enhancement of biodiversity are given significant consideration. The agency encourages community participation and supports community access.

The introduction of lockdown measures during the pandemic has also saw a renewed focus on forests as a recreational environment that is ideally suited for public enjoyment while social distancing. Our estate of 75,000ha consisting of productive forest and green space, is proven as an attractive outdoor recreational option for 4.7M visitors annually and as social distancing measures continue to ease, Forest Service will re-engage with partners to extend the recreation facilities offered in at least 3 forests. Accessibility to outdoor recreation facilities and open space is likely to be viewed as increasing in importance, providing a 'safe' environment to exercise and

contribute to the improved health and wellbeing of society. Ongoing partnership engagement will ensure the targeted promotion of services to take full advantage of the forest space, and best meet the public need in surrounding areas.

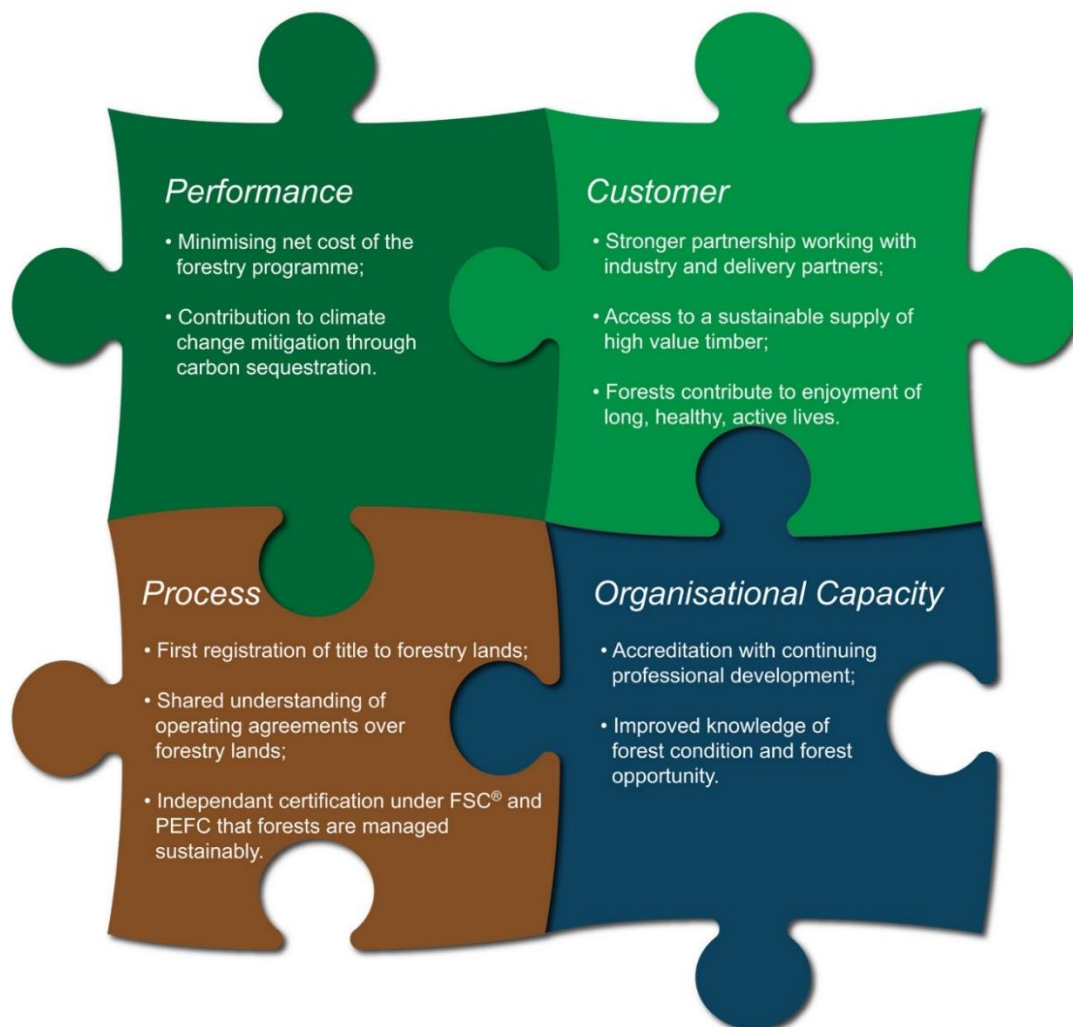
In a typical business year, recreational use of forests including walking, cycling and caravanning & camping holidays can generate approximately £1M towards Forest Service planned income of £11M from all sources.

## **Income Generation**

In 2020/21 Forest Service will continue to support the NI wood processing industry through the supply of at least 400,000m<sup>3</sup> of sustainable timber. Industries such as construction will be strong contributors to economic renewal as society seeks to recover from Covid-19 and maintaining a supply of timber will ensure that local industry remains competitive in the market. With the trading activity of Forest Service recognised by the Office of National Statistics through a Public Non-Financial Corporation classification from 1 April 2020, Forest Service have set a target to achieve at least £10M of income from the sale of the timber to industry this business year.

# Outcomes and Targets

Forest Service aims to achieve the following outcomes in the context of the DAERA strategy and the working draft Programme for Government:



Forest Service programmed activity includes: protecting plants and the environment from serious pests and disease; providing economic, environmental, health and well-being benefits from sustainable managed forests; and creation of new woodlands. These activities help produce outcomes of enhanced environment including its soil, water, landscape, cultural heritage, and biodiversity. Growing trees captures carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and stores carbon in the forest ecosystems that contributes to mitigation of climate change.

## 2020/21 Targets

The Minister has agreed 8 key targets in taking forward the priority work areas set for the agency in this business plan. An additional 14 supporting targets have been identified by the agency which are important elements that contribute to the overall priority work streams.

<b>Create 'Forests for our Future' and help mitigate climate change</b>	
<p><b>Key Target 1</b> Plant at least 250 hectares of new woodland on DAERA owned land and privately owned land with support from forestry grant schemes</p>	31 March 2021
<p><b>Key Target 2</b> Prepare plans for creation of an additional 250 hectares of new woodland on other available public land</p>	31 March 2021
<p><b>Supporting Target:</b> Open the sixth phase of the Forest Expansion scheme</p>	30 July 2020
<p><b>Supporting Target:</b> Open a new small woodland grant scheme</p>	31 December 2020

<b>Supply timber for wood processing</b>	
<p><b>Key Target 3</b> Make available at least 400,000m<sup>3</sup> of timber to customers</p>	31 March 2021
<p><b>Supporting Target:</b> Produce at least 10% of timber supply from forest thinning operations.</p>	31 March 2021

## Protect plant health status following EU Exit transition

<b>Key Target 4</b> Make legislation to implement EU Exit official controls, effective from 1 January 2021	31 December 2020
<b>Key Target 5</b> Make legislation to implement NI official controls consistent with UK policy, effective from 1 January 2021	31 December 2020
<b>Supporting Target:</b> Transpose all EU Implementing Decisions and Regulations taken by 31 August	31 December 2020
<b>Supporting Target:</b> Remake SR 2019/230 The Plant Health (Official Controls Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019	31 December 2020
<b>Supporting Target:</b> Establish Standard Operating Procedures to support implementation of The Plant Health (Official Controls Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019, as remade	31 December 2020
<b>Supporting Target:</b> Revise Standard Operating Procedures for Plant Health official controls to meet import & export requirements emerging under UK and EU trading arrangements	31 March 2021

## Improve contribution from forests to net zero carbon and economic growth

<b>Key Target 6</b> Publish an outline assessment of the greenhouse gas implications of existing forests on peat soils to help determine their sustainability	31 March 2021
<b>Supporting Target:</b> Improve the environmental contribution to ecosystem services from 300 ha of bog and heath habitat.	31 March 2021

## Manage forests sustainably and provide access for people to enjoy recreational, health & well-being benefits, supporting tourism recovery

<b>Key Target 7</b> Hold independent certification that the Forest Service management system meets the requirements of a well-managed forest	31 March 2021
Supporting Target: Address findings from the 2020 certification audits to ensure that DAERA forests can continue to be sustainably managed.	31 March 2021
Supporting Target: Develop an updated forecast of a sustainable timber supply to industry.	31 March 2021
Supporting Target: Protect the DAERA forest estate through securing legal summaries for 15,000 ha of first registered land on GIS and prepare a further 3,000 ha for first registration.	31 March 2021
Supporting Target: Publish a final report on the 2019 forest visitor survey to inform policy and promote sustainable forest ecosystem services.	31 December 2020
Supporting Target: Compliment local government policies on recreation by opening new forest recreational facilities in at least 3 forests in partnership with local councils.	31 March 2021

## Supply services and generate income from forests

<b>Key Target 8</b> Achieve an income for at least £11M from all sources	31 March 2021
Supporting Target: Secure sales of timber to achieve an income of at least £10M	31 March 2021



# Organisation and Resources

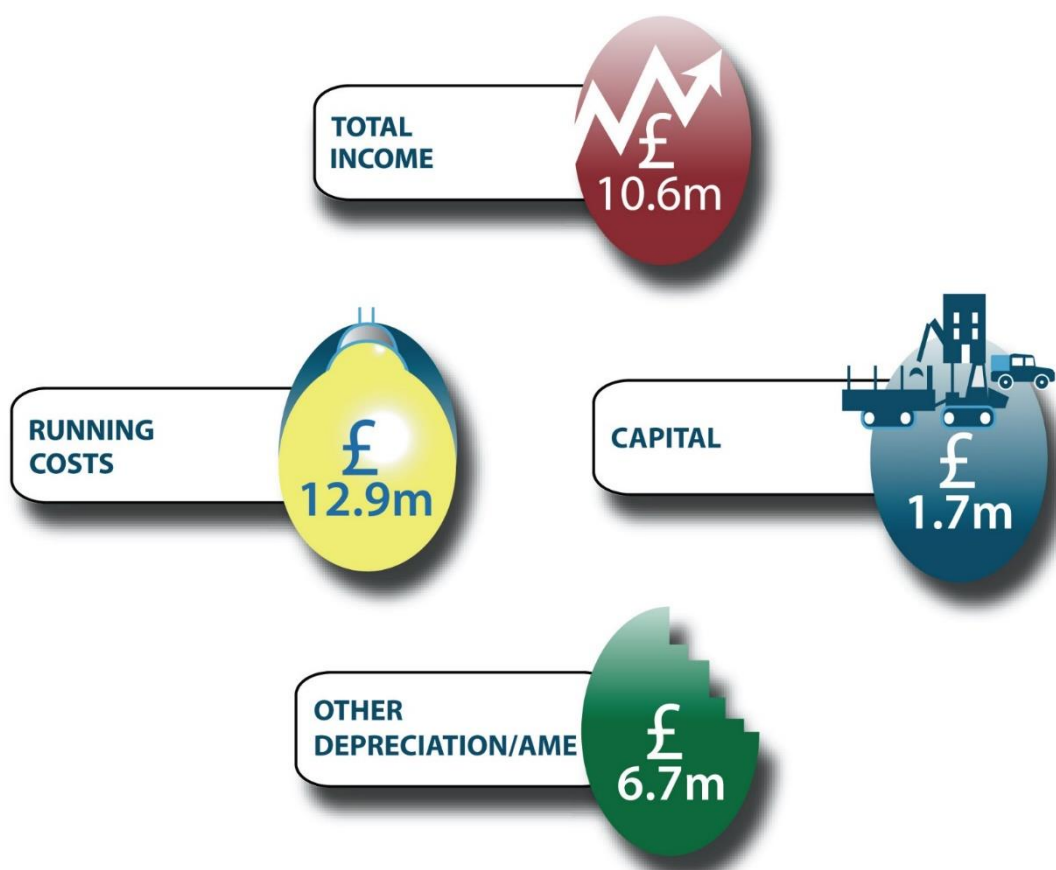
The Agency has a baseline of 215 multi-disciplinary staff (full time equivalents) located at: the Agency's headquarters in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh; DAERA Direct offices; forest offices at Castlewellan, Co. Down and Garvagh, Co. Derry/Londonderry; and at various forest locations. In response to Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of our staff have been equipped to work from home in line with public health guidance. We will continue to support our staff in embedding new ways of working and utilising modern information and communications technology to deliver efficient and effective services, as we work through our recovery from Covid-19 impacts.

## Budget

The agency delivers the work programmes using resources from the DAERA budget as approved by DoF and allocated in accordance with the Minister's priorities.

Budgetary requirements are continually assessed and reported on through in year monitoring rounds and while the baseline allocation below does not include specific provision for managing the effects of Covid-19, consideration will be given in monitoring rounds to any impacts on Income and Expenditure, associated with Covid-19 response and recovery actions for Forest Service.

The Department provides support services, accommodation and standard ICT, as set out in the agency's Framework document.



## Agency Offices

### **Forest Service Headquarters**

Inishkeen House  
Killyhevin  
ENNISKILLEN  
BT74 4EJ  
Phone: 028 6634 3165  
e-mail: [customer.forests@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:customer.forests@daera-ni.gov.uk)

The Grange  
Castlewellan Forest Park  
CASTLEWELLAN  
BT31 9BU  
Phone: 028 4377 8664

Forest Office  
6 Forest Road  
GARVAGH  
BT51 5EF  
Phone: 028 7034 0870

Staff are also based at DAERA Headquarters and various DAERA Direct offices.

Should accessible formats such as large type, audio cassette or a language other than English be required, please contact the Customer Services Manager at Forest Service Headquarters and appropriate arrangements will be made as soon as possible.

e-mail: [customer.forests@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:customer.forests@daera-ni.gov.uk)  
web sites: [www.nidirect.gov.uk/forests](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/forests)  
<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/forestry>



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