

**Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands**

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Chùisean Dùthchail, Ath-leasachadh Fearainn agus Eileanan  
**Mairi Gougeon MSP/BPA**



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Barbara Elborn

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Our Reference: 202300374337

Your Reference: Forestation consultation process

5 October 2023

Dear Barbara Elborn ,

Thank you very much for you letter of 30<sup>th</sup> August concerning current challenges in engaging with Scottish Forestry around woodland creation in the community council area.

I understand that two members of Scottish Forestry's South Scotland Conservancy and a member of the National Office Team attended a meeting with the community, South of Scotland Enterprise and Scottish Borders in Newcastleton on 12<sup>th</sup> September.

Officials advise me that Scottish Forestry undertook a presentation to explain the woodland creation application process and in particular the role of applicants and agents in engaging with the local community through their due diligence requirements to ensure local knowledge, insight, ideas and concerns are captured at an early stage in the development of their respective proposals.

I am aware that a number of stakeholder engagement drop in sessions have been undertaken by agents which have been attended by members of the community council and I'm pleased that these have taken place.

However, it is clear from feedback that I have had from officials that the community in general was not fully aware of the application process including stages where there is an opportunity for the community to feed in valuable views and I have asked that officials continue to seek opportunities to ensure that processes are as transparent and clearly understood as possible.

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Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

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I understand also that you were provided with a link to Scottish Forestry's woodland creation application guidance which includes a flowchart to help you follow the process. There is another link to it [here](#)

My officials advised of their understanding and empathy for your concerns around interpreting often complex map and species design submissions that are sent to you, in volume, at times. I have pressed them to continue to work with agents and the Confederation of Forest Industries (CONFOR) to ensure that forestry proposals are made clear through accessible and interpretable mapping and species descriptions. Indeed Confor are currently reviewing their own membership guidance around community engagement and are trialling update training in South Scotland.

Scottish Forestry has produced refreshed guidance on community guidance [here](#) and I hope you will find this helpful.

At the end of the meeting, in recognition of the need to support communities through training for forestry consultation, I am pleased to hear that an action point was taken for Scottish Forestry to work with SoSE, community groups and the sector to provide training and guidance resources which could be shared across community groups. I very much welcome this approach and congratulate you in helping to shape this action point.

I believe that your list of tangible steps that should be taken will be realised given the steps outlined in this reply together with the actions going forward.

Yours sincerely



**MAIRI GOUGEON**

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