At present, as reported by the Royal Forestry Society in the EFRA led Inquiry 2017, the target to bring woodlands back into management this year is not being met.

From discussions with other small woodland owners and through personal experience, it is apparent that there are 3 definite areas where clearer planning guidance for LPAs would support woodland restoration and small woodland enterprise. These are:

1. **Planning guidance should state that where craft activities and businesses use wood grown within that same woodland site, that such activity would generally be presumed to be seen as ancillary to forestry.**

* Adding Value to timber grown on site can be a necessity for small woodland owners who wish to realise an income from their land[[1]](#endnote-1).
* By supporting this approach, woodland regeneration and rural economies can be financially boosted which would result in a reduction in the reliance on public subsidies or further interventions to achieve the governments stated aims [[2]](#endnote-2).
* The economics of restoring small woodlands to sustained and profitable management requires not just infrastructure, (such as tracks and barns which depend on grant funding), but the ability to turn low value timber felled into more profitable items on site, such as firewood, planks, charcoal, hurdles, other manufactured and craft items (most of these are traditional forestry products commonly produced in woodlands before heavy mechanisation took over and made small woodlands unprofitable). This using of the on-site raw material should not be considered an industrial process but ancillary to forestry. In this manner, small woodlands can become profitable without government subsidy.

1. **The definition of what is ‘Reasonably Necessary’ for forestry[[3]](#endnote-3) should be as broadly interpreted as it is in agriculture. Specifically, it should include ancillary uses and structures needed to support woodland enterprise which serve to achieve the multiple benefits described in the Independent Panel on Forestry Final Report.**

* LPAs have a very varied interpretation of what is considered ‘Reasonably Necessary’ for forestry when dealing with Permitted Development and Prior Notifications. In some instances, the attitude of LPAs can be of open support and encouragement for woodland based enterprise, in others a blanket refusal. Where there is a dispute between the LPA and the developer over “reasonably necessary” perhaps this could be resolved by relying on advice from the Forestry Commission.
* There is a mixed understanding by LPAs of permitted development rights of forestry use, while agricultural use is broadly supported.
* Permitted Development for Forestry buildings does not carry the same redundancy clause in the GPDO that is found in the wording related to buildings for Agricultural use i.e. agricultural buildings becoming redundant within 10 years have to be removed. Not so with forestry buildings. Some LPAs are therefore very reluctant to allow Forestry buildings through Prior Notification as it is feared they can then be declared redundant and used for residential purposes. This is stifling the ability of some woodland owners to get the buildings they need to make woodland management profitable. This brake on progress could be resolved by making Forestry buildings subject to the same redundancy clause as Agricultural ones.
* It would be of great benefit to small-woodland restoration if there was clear government guidance for LPAs which supported the multiple-benefits ancillary to the core forestry activity of felling and planting trees. These benefits include Ecological Improvements, Primary Processing, Craft and Woodland Products, Public Access, Health and Well-Being, Events and Activities engaging people in the woodland. These uses are part and parcel of good forestry management and practice in the UK in the 21st Century. The benefits can be far-reaching, and government planning guidance and the GPDO should support them.

This would also be in line with the government’s new 25 year Environment Plan, which is giving a higher profile to all types of Woodland and Forestry activity and in particular promoting the Health and Wellbeing benefits of engagement with the natural environment.

1. **Planning needs to be supportive of small scale forestry workers who need to live and work in the woods which they manage in order to make a living.**

* This would recognise the economic realities that high cost housing is preventing the viability of small scale woodland enterprises. Again this would release the potential for woodland to be brought back into management without government subsidy.
* This would allow enterprises which are able to make a livelihood from the working of a woodland to be able to develop a home linked to their woodland management. Suitable conditions would need to be set for the sympathetic construction and ecological integrity of any development. A clear example of this being a success, where residential use was tied to the active management of the woodland, is Ben Law at Prickly Nut Wood in East Sussex.
* This would go a small way towards the need for new low-cost housing in the UK whilst bringing small woodlands back into management.

1. Chris Marrow report explaining woodland economics attached. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. as per the Government Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement: Incorporating the response to the Independent Panel on Forestry’s Final Report, January 2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Class E Part 6 of Schedule 2 to the General Permitted Development Order [↑](#endnote-ref-3)