14 December 2016

Dear Graeme

CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF FORESTRY PLANTING PROPOSALS

Scotland’s forests and woodlands are among our most valuable rural assets and our ambition is for them to expand and flourish. As part of a broader package of reforms to drive forward forestry’s contribution to the rural economy and to support delivery of climate change targets, I asked Jim Mackinnon CBE to provide an analysis of the current arrangements for the consideration and approval of forestry planting proposals and to make recommendations for improvements to the process.

I am pleased to let you know that the report has been published today and I have accepted in principle all of its recommendations. I am confident that implementing the recommendations will allow us to speed up and streamline approval processes for sustainable planting schemes. The recommendations include:

- Appointing accredited, experienced agents to help certify some woodland planting schemes and giving FCS local offices more responsibility to approve lower value applications.
- Earlier engagement between tree-planting businesses and communities, in a way that is proportionate to the scale and impact of the planting scheme.
- A dedicated national Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) team to deal with complex proposals, including all projects where an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.
The report can be accessed at http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Rural/Forestry. If the Committee have any questions about the report, please ask your Clerks to contact Ginny Gardner at ginny.gardner@gov.scot or 0131 244 2376.

Yours sincerely

FERGUS EWING