

Forestry Commission operational update: coronavirus

The information on this page was updated on 2 December 2020.

In common with most organisations dealing with the effects of coronavirus, the Forestry Commission is following [government guidance](#) and taking all steps necessary to protect our staff, public safety and help prevent the spread of the virus.

We know that many people rely on our services. We have continued our normal operational work as far as it has been safe to do so – both for us and others. During the [coronavirus restrictions for local areas which starts on the 2 December 2020](#), we will be asking our staff to continue to work from home to serve our customers, but we are also carrying out priority site based work, where this can be done in line with government advice. Some of our offices will remain open in a more limited capacity for essential work that cannot be done at home.

As the situation continues to develop, we will keep our operations and advice under review in line with current government advice. We are working closely with other Defra delivery organisations and have adopted a common set of principles for deploying field staff in light of coronavirus. This reflects a common commitment to sharing expertise and good practice to the benefit of all.

Please be aware that in common with other public service organisations, we expect that increased staff absences caused by coronavirus will inevitably reduce our capacity over the coming weeks and months, despite our best efforts to minimise any disruption. We will use contingency planning to maintain our statutory and customer-facing activities and will publish any updates on changes on GOV.UK.

Offices

Some of our offices will remain open as Covid-secure workplaces which enable a limited number of staff to complete essential work that cannot be done from home.

We are not able to accept visitors to our offices at this time.

Site visits and operations

To support the sector, we are continuing to provide our grant and regulatory services, including site visits where assessed as needed, as well as continuing with critical tree health work. Social distancing guidelines will be followed in all cases and site visits will only go ahead where it is safe to do so. Our approach will be reviewed as government advice is updated.

In the event of any temporary local lockdowns, we will assess our working practices and ensure the appropriate coronavirus local control measures are followed. In this instance we may only respond to significant plant health risks in these local areas if regulated outbreak measures are necessary.

We continue to support the forestry sector by processing [felling licences online](#). In some cases your local Woodland Officer may request a site visit to finalise our decisions on applications. We will contact you if this is the case. Work on investigating alleged illegal felling will continue, so please provide reports of anything suspicious via email to [your local area office](#). For other regulatory and grant related work we will assess all cases and progress remotely where possible, but we may still request a site visit.

Site visits for critical tree health work will continue. This is outlined in more detail below ([Plant Health Forestry](#) section of this page). Private forestry operations can continue where social distancing can be observed. Government guidance on this can be found on GOV.UK, under [guidance for outdoor businesses](#) and [working safely during coronavirus in construction and other outdoor work](#). FISA have also published [guidance for working safely during coronavirus in forestry](#).

Businesses should also look to advice published by trade associations and similar groups on how to apply government guidance to their sector.

Grants

We are continuing to operate Forestry Commission grant and fund services as well as working with our partners to minimise the impact of coronavirus on Countryside Stewardship applications. In some cases, we may need to request further information from you to help progress your application. This may include a site visit.

If you have any problems meeting any application, agreement or claim deadline or requirements please contact Rural Payments as soon as possible:

While the [new national restrictions](#) are in place, please avoid sending post to our offices as we are working at reduced capacity and are unable to check this regularly. As we have limited staff working in our offices, we are still not able to answer the phone. Email is the best way to contact us.

For felling licences, legacy grant agreements or cases of illegal felling, please use the Admin Hub email addresses below. For details on which Admin Hub you need to contact, see our [office contacts](#) on GOV.UK.

Admin Hubs:

For grants and funds, contact:

For issues relating to Countryside Stewardship please contact Rural payments:

To report tree pests and diseases, use the [TreeAlert online reporting tool](#).

For import and export queries (wood and timber products), contact plant.health@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

Plant Health Forestry

In light of the coronavirus pandemic, Defra and the Forestry Commission carried out a review of critical functions earlier in the year, and agreed that port inspections and export work were essential to enable the [import and export trade](#) to continue. Regulated outbreak management of some high-priority work on [tree pests and diseases](#) was also continued.

We have considered the new national restrictions, and it remains our intention to continue with these operations during this period. In all cases our work will be carried out safely with regard to staff, public safety, and social distancing requirements. We will continue to review our approach in line with current government advice.

The nation's forests – managed by Forestry England

Forestry England has continued the essential tasks of caring for our nation's forests and growing and harvesting trees for much-needed timber products during the coronavirus crisis.

The nation's forests remain open to visitors for outdoor recreation and exercise. If you are planning to visit one of our forests, make sure you [plan ahead](#) and follow the latest Government guidance regarding tier levels. Please do not visit if you have coronavirus symptoms or are self-isolating.

Forest Research

[Forest Research](#)'s main research stations at Alice Holt in Surrey and the Northern Research Station near Edinburgh are open and Covid-secure. Many staff continue to work from home. There are, however, staff carrying out operationally essential work at research stations and in the field as this cannot be undertaken from home. This includes vital tree health disease research and responding to plant health emergency events to support UK trade, IT support, laboratory based research, facilities management and security.

Other departments' working practices

Below, you can find updates on the working practices of: