

## Case study

# Scottish farmland returns back to a forest

Tilhill has managed a project that involved the conversion of a large upland sheep and cattle farm extending to just over 1000ha, close to Newcastleton in Scotland, into a significant area of productive forest – helping to meet government targets for planting and supporting the wood processing industry.

The land was purchased from a local farmer by a Tilhill client with the intention of establishing a well-designed commercial woodland with the main focus being on investment return.

To inform the woodland design process and support the application for permission to plant the proposed woodland the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process had to be followed. This saw a very detailed Environmental Statement (ES) produced and approved. This key document was generated through a team effort which called upon every aspect of Tilhill's in-house expertise: from the Ecology Team to Forest Managers and Senior Management. Some of the more specialist survey and report work, archaeology, soils and habitat was outsourced to expert advisors.

Tilhill staff worked on the grant application and the forestry design, utilising the large volume of detail and knowledge collected through the EIA process. The application and design was submitted and approved by the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) after a lengthy and detailed consultation process.

Tilhill's Forest Manager Andrew Fisher explains: "We had to produce a design that fitted with our client's objectives but also met the requirements of the UK Forest Standard (UKFS), while satisfying the various consultees, namely FCS and Scottish Borders Council.

"One of the most important issues that was raised through the consultation process was ensuring the woodland design fitted in with the local landscape character, especially in the valley bottom. This point saw significant discussions between the interested parties and the design of this lower ground was revised to address their concerns culminating in the introduction of a more diverse design and species mix."

*Below: Ploughed Field Awaiting Planting*

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## Case study – continued

After almost three years of planning and hard work, the Environmental Statement and grant application was approved. This approval gave permission to plant 1.2 million conifers which will reach maturity and produce timber in 35 to 40 years' time. The key commercial species is Sitka spruce, accounting for 70% of all the trees to be planted. These trees will provide timber for Scotland's ever developing timber processing sector with the raw materials going for conversion to construction timber, pallet boards, paper and panel board production, among other outlets.

A significant element of Scots Pine planting has been incorporated to create visual diversity and enhance the habitat value of the woodlands, along with Western Red Cedar and productive broad leaves on the lower, more sensitive, valley bottom. All of the Sitka spruce is from improved stock, seed orchard and full sibling. We also used improved Cedar stock.

One of the biggest operational challenges facing the Tilhill team was access and transportation of materials across the vast 4km wide site as there weren't any roads and the terrain was very rough and included many deep water courses.

Challenges going forward will include minimising browsing damage of the young trees by deer and other herbivores as the site is surrounded by forest. A significant area of the softer, more palatable species on the lower ground has been protected by the erection of deer-proof fencing and the installation of vole guards.

Community consultation was a very important part of the planning process and included public drop in days.



Above: Improved Seed Orchard Transplant Sitka Spruce 6 Weeks After Planting

