

CHAPTER 7

Unplanted Areas, Biodiversity and Setback distances

Areas for Biodiversity Enhancement (ABEs) as described in the Forest Biodiversity Guidelines are comprised of open spaces and retained habitat. Their function is to conserve and encourage the development of diverse habitats, native flora and fauna, and biodiversity.

The Forest Biodiversity Guidelines require that ABEs should comprise approximately 15% of individual grant aided afforestation projects, which are greater than 10 hectares. (In sites less than 10 ha in area the open space element of ABEs should be designed in conjunction with neighbouring land use and may be reduced.)

7.1 Eligibility as an ABE

The following table outlines areas left unplanted in forest plantations and indicates which are eligible as ABEs in individual projects and their eligibility for grants and premiums.

Table 3. Eligibility of Areas for ABE's, grants and premiums

Areas	ABE	Grant	Premium
Open space for landscape and biodiversity	Yes	*	**
Hedgerows	Yes	*	**
Scrub	Yes	*	**
Buffer zones along aquatic zones	Yes	*	**
Archaeological sites and their exclusion zones	Yes	*	**
Created lakes/reservoirs	Yes	*	**
Former REPS habitats	Yes	*	**
Public road setback areas	Yes	*	**
Railway setback strip	Yes	*	**
Ridelines and drains	Yes	*	**
Internal roads and turning bay setback areas	Yes	*	**
Unplantable areas	***	*	**
Shallow, rocky soils	***	*	**
Rock and scree	***	No	No
Aquatic zones (area occupied by lake/ river)	***	No	No
Plantation forest. (Conifer High Forest and Broadleaf High Forest - this includes newly planted areas with conventional stocking densities.)	No	No	No
Non Plantation forest	Yes	*	**
Dwelling house/associated building setback area	Yes	*	**
Rights of way held by third party	No	No	No
Areas with turbary or grazing rights held by a third party	No	No	No
Major water mains	***	No	No
Power line corridors	***	No	No
Gas line	***	No	No
Public road	No	No	No

* An ABE of plot size is subject to grant aid if it has been subject to work and legitimate costs in the afforestation of the project

** An ABE is subject to premium if it adheres to the definition of utilised agricultural area (Commission Regulation (EC) No.1750/1999) prior to the commencement of the associated afforestation.

*** These areas can be included as ABEs if in the view of the Forest Service it has sufficient biodiversity value.

Where ABEs add up to more than 15% of the total area the following calculation should be applied.

$$\text{Payment area} = \frac{\text{Actual planted area}}{85} \times 100$$

7.2 Mapping and recording ABE Features

It is often not practical to map linear or spot features such as hedgerows or individual trees on maps of scale 1:10560. However, where practical, features should be lettered and recorded on the map legend. For grant and premium purposes these features follow normal practice of adopting the Grant/Premium Category (GPC) in which they are situated. Features that may be incorporated as part of the ABE but are not subject to grant aid or to premium should be excluded from the plot area.

7.3 Mapping and recording ABE Plots

An ABE of plot size should be mapped and recorded as a plot in the map legend. In this instance a plot will have a minimum width of 40 metres. The abbreviation "Bio" should be used in the species column on forms 1,2 and 3 and on the map legends. The GPC should be that of the largest adjoining planted plot. Areas that may be incorporated as part of the ABE but are not subject to grant aid or to premium should be marked "Bio" in the species column and "Ex" in the GPC column of the map legend. The area should also be recorded.

7.4 Grant aiding ABE plots

An ABE of plot size as defined above is subject to grant aid if it has been subject to work and legitimate costs in the afforestation of the project. Operations, if any, on (the sum of) such plots requires to be costed on a separate 'Statement of Costs' sheet from that portion of the lands which has been planted. In detailing costs in the 'Cost of Work Carried Out' table in page 4 of Form 2, the GPC of the ABE should be that of the largest adjoining planted plot.

7.5 Biodiversity Map Legend

The map legend on Form 1,2 and 3 maps should show:

- Plot data
- % ABE and its composition (e.g. "15% ABE comprised of hedgerows, native woodland scrub lettered AB, archaeological site lettered E, riparian zone lettered A-B and C-D)

An ABE must be included as an intrinsic part of the individual grant aided afforestation project and must be protected and fenced as part of the project.

The maximum grant aided area of ABE in afforestation projects continues to be approximately 15% of **total** area.

If a site such as an intensively farmed area does not contain sufficient retained habitat the planting of native trees and shrubs either in widely spaced groups or at wide spacing may fulfil the retained habitat obligation – see the section entitled Open Space in the Forest Biodiversity Guidelines.

7.6 Setback/corridor width Conventions

The principle for setback distances differs between planted and existing trees.

Existing trees

If existing trees did not breach the setback distances applicable at the time they were planted the setback distances set out here do not apply to them as part of a current grant scheme. This does not preclude a special condition being made in relation to individual projects.

Planted trees

Planting in this case refers to the planting of trees for all schemes whether afforestation, reforestation, woodland improvement, reconstitution etc. In these cases all the setback distances apply.

Public road setback strip

A setback strip of 10m for broadleaves and 20m for conifers, measured to the surfaced edge of the public road, applies. Note in conifer plantations the strip 10m to 20m should be planted with broadleaves and not left unplanted. This distance is an average distance for single applications and should vary to take account of good landscaping practices.

Dwelling Houses/associated buildings setback areas

A setback distance of 60m from dwelling houses and associated buildings or 30m where written consent is granted prior to approval. Set back distance is most critical when a building is surrounded by forest on two sides or more. Where adjoining properties are 0.2 ha or less, planting should be kept back 30 m from the property boundary.

Rights of way held by parties other than the owner

This varies but is normally no more than a corridor of 5m or as set out in the Folio document.

Major Water mains (Local Authority or Group Scheme)

A corridor of 15m applies.

Gas line

A corridor of 15 m applies where the gas line has been installed prior to planting. A corridor of up to 30 m applies where the gas line was installed after the area was planted. Refer to Appendix 24 –IFA/Bord Gais agreement on compensation for gas pipeline wayleaves through forestry. Forestry grants and premiums must be repaid in respect of the area deforested.

ESB corridors (see also Chapter 7)

The following corridors apply:

Power line type	Corridor width (centred)
Low voltage (230/400V)	none (clearance from branches and tree tops only)
10 kV and 38 kV	20 m
110 kV	61 m
220 kV	68 m
400 kV	74 m

Wind Turbines

30m setback must be observed in the case of new afforestation around pre-existing turbines. Where the plantation pre-dates the installation of wind turbines, permission of the Forest Service is required before any trees are removed. Forestry grants and premiums may have to be repaid in respect of areas deforested.

Ridelines

Normally 6m wide

Internal roads & turning bays etc.

Normally 15m corridor

Drains, Hedges, Created lakes/reservoirs, Current REPS habitats

Varies

Firebreaks

6m wide fuel free zone

Railway setback strips

20 m

Points of Water Abstraction

If there are pump houses or substantial tank type reservoirs then the setback distance should be 30 metres (as for buildings and permanent structures - it is not necessary to obtain the owner's consent.) If they are wells or boreholes the minimum setback distance for all work should be as per the buffer zone width outlined in the Forestry and Water Quality Guidelines. Tree planting setback distance should be such that it is equal to the ultimate falling distance of the species (e.g. commercial conifers and broadleaves 25 metres, birch, rowan, sally etc. can be up to the buffer zone width.)