



THE BEDE HOWELL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SILVICULTURE 2026

Rules & Guidelines

1. This Award is to recognise and encourage exemplary silviculture in commercial woodland or compartments of established crops where wood production (quality timber or other commercial products) is the primary aim.
2. The Awards rotate annually around five regions across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. On the sixth year, a Best of the Best Award may be held with regional winners invited to take part. In 2026, the Awards will be for entrants from the South East of England, defined as the counties covered by the RFS Divisions: Home Counties, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire, London, Southern and South Eastern.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

3. Entries are invited from forest owners or managers from the private, public or voluntary sectors.
4. The woodland entered must conform to the UK Forestry Standard requirements and guidelines and UKWAS requirements but need not be certified or under any grant scheme. All entries must conform to all legal requirements such as felling licences.
5. Compartments must be greater than two hectares in size that have been established. An individual tree is considered 'established' when it is growing satisfactorily and is not at risk from early weed competition or early nutrient deficiency. An area is considered 'established' when there are sufficient trees or stocking density to form a closed canopy in due course.
6. Woods must be at least two hectares. There is no upper limit for the area that can be entered into the competition, but entrants should be able to demonstrate the award-winning qualities of their site within a half-day visit from our judges.

JUDGING CRITERIA

7. Management objectives and practices must be primarily concerned with the production of a commercial crop of wood (quality timber or other commercial products).
8. In particular, the judges will be looking for: an understanding of market(s) for the crop; appropriate choice of species and provenance; details of past silvicultural operations, particularly during establishment of the crop; and a clear strategy for future silvicultural interventions.

9. The judges will be wanting to understand why your entry merits recognition above other entrants, e.g. beyond meeting the requirements of grants received to support work undertaken. Entries should be clear about the aspects of silviculture being exemplified, interventions made and the results achieved etc.
10. The judges will also take into account management practices aimed at maintaining or improving landscape, biodiversity, recreation or education.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

11. Entry forms can be downloaded from the Royal Forestry Society website. Please refer to the eligibility and judging criteria above when completing your application.
12. Entrants must submit a 500-word written statement with the accompanying form showing how their woodland is managed for commercial wood production.
13. The completed entry form should be sent preferably by email to eif@rfs.org.uk or exceptionally by post to RFS Excellence in Forestry Awards, The Hay Barns, Home Farm Drive, Upton Estate, Banbury, OX15 6HU.
14. Please contact Andrea Donnelly by email eif@rfs.org.uk or phone 01295 678588 if you require clarification.
15. **The closing date for entries is noon on 30 April 2026.** An email will be sent to acknowledge that your application has been received and will be considered.

SHORTLISTING AND JUDGING

16. The RFS will appoint a panel of two judges. All entries will be assessed, and final judging will take place on site, but the judges will short-list according to the quality and composition of the entry form and written statement. It is therefore crucial that you show through your application how your wood meets the eligibility and judging criteria above, and that you provide all the information requested, to enable the judges to fully assess your entry. Entries that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be shortlisted.
17. In drawing up the shortlist, the judges will seek to ensure that all woods are given equal opportunity regardless of their size and composition, and that each property is evaluated in its own context. The judges' decision is final.
18. Judging is expected to take place in July/August 2026. It is particularly important that the judges should meet and be accompanied during the woodland inspection by those responsible for both deciding and implementing the forest management policies and practices. They should be well-briefed and prepared to answer wide-ranging questions about the woodland.

19. When judging is completed, the judges prepare a comprehensive report which is published in the *Quarterly Journal of Forestry*. Individual reports on each wood are not available but the RFS is keen to disseminate learning and may contact winning entrants to develop case studies on their woods.

PUBLICITY, PRIZES AND PRESENTATION

20. Winners are asked not to publicise their awards until authorised by the RFS.

21. The Award will consist of:

- **First Prize** – a trophy (to be held for one year), cash prize of £500 and a certificate
- **Second Prize** – a certificate and cash prize of £250.

22. The Award Ceremony will take place in October 2026, venue is to be confirmed.

NOTES

23. The cash prize may be modified by the RFS as it sees fit.

24. No member of any RFS judging panel and no RFS national officer may enter their own woodland for the Award during their term of office.

25. The Society reserves the right to:

- a) suspend the competition at its own discretion
- b) decide against awarding any or all of the prizes if it feels they are not warranted

**The RFS Bede Howell Excellence in Forestry Award for Silviculture 2026
is sponsored by Tilhill Forestry.**

