

COMMUNITY WOODLAND OF THE YEAR AWARD 2026

Rules & Guidelines

1. The purpose of this Award is to encourage and reward woodland projects that benefit communities. Specifically, we are looking for woodland which has been established and managed in a way which is sustainable and beneficial to the landscape, the local people, biodiversity and the economy in both the short and long term.
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 all woods or groups of woods under the same management.
4. Woods can be located in a rural or urban setting. In addition, distinct urban treescapes for example including public parks, gardens, arboreta, and street trees, are eligible.
5. There is no minimum area. Expansive areas of woodland should be entered as a whole, and the overall objectives of management stated on the entry form. Where the area entered exceeds 200 hectares, a representative single block or coherent unit of woodland, up to a maximum of 200 hectares should be entered for judging.

JUDGING CRITERIA

6. The judges are looking for projects that can demonstrate that they use trees, woods and forests to address two or more of the following:
 - to **improve the places** where people live e.g. strengthening sense of place, improving derelict and degraded land
 - to bring **benefits to people** e.g. health and well-being, education and training, sport and recreation
 - to **strengthen communities** e.g. diversity and inclusion, volunteering and active citizenship
 - to **enhance biodiversity** and the natural environment

7. Entries should also show that these benefits are being supported though one or more of the following:
 - positive **involvement** of local people in the planning, management and enjoyment of the woodland
 - provision of appropriate on-site **infrastructure** to facilitate public use e.g. paths, signage, interpretation, visitor facilities etc.
 - appropriate **information and outreach** work e.g. leaflets, events, educational programmes, rangers etc.
 - where appropriate, demonstrate **linkages** between neighbouring sites
8. Entries should demonstrate good governance and be taking steps to 'future proof' the initiative.
9. The judges will look at the range, quality and benefits to people and place. It is not all about scale - more about the difference it makes to local people.
10. Entries should comply with best practices and guidelines produced by organisations such as the Forestry Commission England, Natural Resources Wales, Northern Ireland Forest Service the Community Forest Partnership, and other countryside agencies.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

11. Entry forms can be downloaded from the RFS web site. Please refer to the eligibility and judging criteria above when completing your application.
12. Entrants must submit the entry form with a written statement (max 500 words) showing how their wood is managed for the overall benefits mentioned above. Or if you are nominating the woodland, you can fill in the entry form sections.
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, however the judges will short-list according to the quality and composition of the application and written submission. It is therefore crucial that you show through your written application how your project 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 all the criteria will not be shortlisted.

17. In drawing up the shortlist, the judges will ensure that all woodland will be given equal opportunity, regardless of its size or 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 and conservation 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 as the RFS sees fit.
24. No member of any judging panel and no national RFS 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.

**Community Woodland of the Year Award 2026
is sponsored by the Woodland Trust.**

