

Selling Conifers



**Chiltern
Woodlands
Project**

Registered Charity No. 1002512



Felling a large Douglas fir



Valuable Douglas fir timber awaiting collection



Articulated lorry collecting timber from a specially created off road loading bay

The success in selling conifers is influenced by many factors. It is partly about numbers, how many trees do you have to sell and what is the quality like?

- Know what you have got? eg Larch, spruce, pine, fir etc
- How old and big are they? Size matters! Conifers can grow too big for some sawmills. You may need to make up a minimum of a lorry load (about 25 tonnes) of each type of produce.
- What is the timber market looking for at the time you are planning to sell? Do you need to fell it now or can you afford to wait? Will prices improve / recover?
- Decide what you want to do for the benefit of the wood and what your objectives are: this will help you make decisions about which trees you want to fell.
- There are several different approaches to managing coniferous woods depending on the desired outcomes.
 - Do you want to get the maximum income now, or in future?
 - Do you want to convert a coniferous woodland to broadleaves?
 - Do you want to improve the growth of the remaining trees?
 - Are you trying to change the habitat by opening up rides and glades?
- Conifer plantations are often thinned about every 5 years - particularly in larger woods where there is sufficient volume of timber. In small woods it may be harder to get a suitable quantity together to make it worth while, given the start up costs of bringing equipment to site.
- Remember to consider how the contractor is going to fell the trees.
- Identify other constraints eg wildlife, archaeology, other uses, powerlines etc
- Mark trees from the same direction eg with paint spots, so trees to be felled can be clearly identified (exceptions could be either line thinnings or clear felling where only the ends of the rows or boundaries of the clearing need to be marked). Some contractors prefer trees marked on either side so they can be found more easily.
- Keep a record of the numbers of each species marked and do a sample measure of tree girths (show range of sizes) and heights. Estimate volume of timber.
- Also remember they have to get to the trees and get them out with generally quite large machinery eg forwarder tractor.
- Get felling permission from the Forestry Commission - you need a felling licence to sell timber. There are two ways to get this either as a simple felling licence application to fell marked trees, which may take about 2 months to obtain, or as part of a long term management plan (which the FC will probably grant aid under their English Woodland Grant Scheme but this takes longer to arrange). See www.forestry.gov.uk

myForest
linking the woodchain



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas



- Consider access and stacking areas - there are currently grants (60% of invoiced costs but must be agreed in advance of any work) to help put these into unmanaged woods. This may also require planning consent.
- Invite three or four companies that are likely to be interested to make an offer for the marked trees. Offers can vary quite widely. Check they are competent and have adequate insurance.
- Draw up a clear sales agreement with key points stated. Include a time scale. This will help clarify what is expected and can reduce the risk of disputes.
- Be clear how the trees are to be felled - most likely to either be manual, using chainsaws or with a harvester - the processor is computer controlled to cut specific diameters of tree to particular lengths.
- Timber can also be sold at roadside to buyers, usually by weight, but this can be more of a risk. If you get timber cut to the wrong length then it may not be saleable. The poorer material is often cut to 3 metre lengths to fit on an articulated lorry to be used as chip or for fuel (but even this varies).
- More valuable timber can be cut into longer sawlogs for a variety of markets. This timber is generally moved off site first!
- For smaller parcels it may be worth adding value using a mobile sawmill.
- Sometimes buyers want to leave the poorer timber in the wood to dry (season) - it loses weight as it dries so if paid by tonne you will get less for it! You need to be clear how long timber is going to be left on site and where it will be safely stacked.
- The timber market is changing - transport costs are an issue and many sawmills are a long way from woods in the Chilterns. There is increasing demand for both firewood and wood chip for fuel / heating. Alternatives markets may exist which may need a different way of operating to traditional practices.
- Specify how lop and top is to be left eg cut and scattered to rot where it fell, or pushed up into heaps. Is burning allowed? Fires are only really necessary when replanting clearings. If whole tree harvesting for wood chip there will be little waste!
- You may need to consider leaving some standing and fallen dead wood to improve this important element of the woodland habitat.
- Avoid felling from late March to early August when birds are nesting and spring flowers etc may be damaged and consider protected species such as bats.
- It may be possible to sell standing conifer timber through websites such as MYForest
See www.sylva.org.uk/myforest/directories.php
Or Woodlots www.woodnet.org.uk/woodlots/



Conifer marked with red paint spot for felling



Harvester cutting larch to length

Contact John Morris, Chiltern Woodlands Project
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You can download information sheets from:

www.chilternsaonb.org/about-chilterns/woodlands/woodlands_project.html

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