

# UKWAS Interpretation Note 10

## Whether infrastructure associated with a small-scale hydroelectric project located in High Conservation Value (HCV) woodland constitutes “conversion” under UKWAS 5.

**PLEASE NOTE: THIS INTERPRETATION NOTE RELATES TO THE FIFTH EDITION OF THE UK WOODLAND ASSURANCE STANDARD (VERSION 5)**

**Key words:** HCV woodland, Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), conversion.

### Relevant requirement references:

- 2.13.2a The woodland types identified in 4.1-4.4 are not converted to plantation or non-forested land through loss or degradation.
- 4.3.1e Remnants and conservation features (within Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)) are maintained and enhanced.

**Date:** This Interpretation Note was discussed by the Panel on 23 June 2026 and agreed on 7 July 2026. It was then submitted to the UKWAS Steering Group and approved on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2026.

### Interpretation request:

A small-scale community hydroelectric scheme is proposed on land within High Conservation Value (HCV) woodland (Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS)). The proposed development has been consented by the local planning authority.

1. Does the development constitute “conversion” under UKWAS 5?
2. Whether scale, duration, mitigation, net gain, restoration or the wider social and community benefit are material considerations when assessing the conversion requirements of UKWAS 5.
3. Whether there are any circumstances under which UKWAS-compliant alternatives (such as relocation, re-design, or off-site compensation) could be considered.

### Interpretation

The development would constitute conversion. The proposed powerhouse would involve the permanent loss, contrary to Requirement 2.13.2, of 100m<sup>2</sup> of PAWS woodland. The excavation of the pipeline would disturb, contrary to Requirement 4.3.1e, what remains of the natural soil profile, a classified remnant feature of PAWS sites.

While the community and social benefits of the hydro scheme are recognised, these cannot override the HCV protection requirements of UKWAS 5. Off-site compensation is not an option under UKWAS 5, and the Panel was of the opinion that no re-design would prevent damage to the HCV woodland. Any relocation within the Woodland Management Unit would need to be outside HCV areas, and compliant with UKWAS 5 requirements. Excision options are outside the scope of UKWAS interpretation.

### Conclusion

The hydro scheme does constitute conversion, causes significant and unrecoverable damage to PAWS/HCV values and as such, is not permitted under UKWAS 5.