

**Case Study**

# **Bringing neglected woodland into sustainable management**

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**WOODLAND  
TRUST**

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As retirement projects go, it's a big one – Peter and Brenda Tebby are felling trees and clearing undergrowth as custodians of their own ancient wood.

Peter and wife Brenda had a mission: to restore valuable, natural habitat, leaving a positive legacy for future generations, by owning and managing their own wood. Their stewardship of Reffolds Copse, covering 18 hectares (44 acres) in Surrey, has been a labour of love. Taking on the physical work themselves, they have restored shady conifer plantations to vibrant native broadleaf woodland, bright with colour and full of wildlife, which also provides an inexhaustible supply of woodfuel.

## The perfect copse

Peter and Brenda Tebby found Reffolds Copse, near Dorking, in October 2010. The woodland had been neglected for over 30 years. Plantations of western hemlock had grown unchecked for over 20 years, and self-generating birch trees added to the crowding and dense, dark canopy, choking native species. Where areas of ancient woodland survived, it suffered from well-established and invasive rhododendron.

Peter and Brenda aim to convert the neglected woodland at Reffolds Copse into a healthy, thriving habitat where flora and fauna can flourish. They hope the wood will form part of their legacy - somewhere grandchildren can cherish and enjoy for decades to come.

“We had wanted our own woodland for a long time but it took us a while to find the right one, especially near London. We were looking for a site where we could make a positive and lasting difference to the condition and habitat. Bringing neglected woodland into sustainable management is something we feel is a worthwhile thing to do.”

“My only regret is that we can't live to 150 and see the habitat growing richer. Hopefully our children and grandchildren will carry on here. My career overseas now seems to have achieved little lasting good, but here we're tending something, making it better. It's exciting, and it makes me content.”

Peter Tebby

## Providing a sustainable source of energy

To cover the restoration costs, the couple sell logs for firewood and biofuel, helping to make their woodland management sustainable. They have a mutually beneficial partnership with a local biomass energy company, who use thinnings and cuttings in green energy production; even plantations of larch and hemlock throughout the woodland are helping the wood pay its way.



Reffolds Copse

## Key Facts

- Reffolds Copse is a 44 acre woodland that comprises two plantation areas on ancient woodland (PAWS), plus an area of ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW).
- Under a deal with their local biomass energy company they sell 18-tonne loads of hemlock for biomass, at £400 a time. It takes about a month to extract each load.
- The Tebbys paid £250,000 for Reffolds Copse, and are investing £19,000 in a quad bike, log trailer, crane and mobile sawmill to extract and process their timber.
- Two tonnes of offcuts per year heat their Richmond home, and they sell a few tonnes too.
- They plan to mill hornbeam, beech and other hardwoods into high-value sawn timber. They've already made themselves some new garage doors!

Once the thinnings are cut from the wood, the low-grade timber is removed from the woodland in small stacks. The wood is collected, providing approximately 18.5 tonnes of timber a month for local sale, as well as enough fuel to heat their home.

## The restoration so far

They began the first stage of their restoration project by removing hemlock stands and coppicing the remaining hazel. Two hectares of rhododendrons have been cleared, allowing more light to reach the woodland floor where natural regeneration is helping restore the native tree species.

The Tebbys sought the help of the Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission to plan their project. Woodland Trust project officer Jim Smith-Wright conducted a full site visit of Reffolds Copse and advised on the planned restoration works. The couple were granted a thinning licence for 500 cubic metres of conifers and deciduous trees by the Forestry Commission; so far this licence

has been used to thin hemlock stands, halo-thin around oak trees and create open glades. Their site was also investigated by Woodland Trust heritage volunteer Keith Lelliot who provided the Tebbys with a bespoke heritage-trail map, highlighting the remaining ancient features of the site. In the autumn Peter and Brenda hosted a Woodland Trust demonstration day at Reffolds Copse, inspiring other landowners to the woodland restoration cause.

Brenda says they're already seeing the improvement: "We hear owls at night and delight in the butterflies that are re-colonising the wood. We were novices when we started, but plenty of advice is out there – and knowing that we're helping to restore a fragment of ancient woodland means a great deal to us."

Their work is a microcosm of what the Woodland Trust is doing in ancient woodland restoration; selectively felling commercial conifers at its own woods nationwide, to revive the ancient woodland species that have survived, and encouraging timber producers and landowners to do the same.

## The additional benefits of restoring ancient woodland

- **Firewood:** There is a growing market for wood fuel produced through restoration work or from sensitively-managed restored woods. If your farm or estate uses firewood or woodchips, then restoration can provide a sustainable home-produced source of fuel
- **Timber:** The process of restoration, by its very nature, produces timber. Many woods in need of restoration are capable of producing economically viable timber as non natives are gradually removed. Restoration in its initial stages is similar to commercial harvesting, with a few extra conservation safeguards.
- **Conservation:** Healthy habitats give homes to a wider variety of birds and animals. Restored ancient woodland provides the unique conditions that allow delicate plants, birds and animals to thrive.
- **Game:** Restoration produces a more diverse woodland structure with more shelter and food, making restored woods more game-friendly.
- **Shelter:** Broadleaved woods are inherently more stable than conifer woods, which often encounter stability problems as they age. Restoration can help produce sustainable long-term shelter that is more effective.
- **Resilience:** Restored woods have greater structure and species diversity. With the rising threats of climate change and tree disease, this improves resilience and avoids having all your eggs in one basket.

## How the Trust can help

Conifers were planted across the UK to meet the country's demand for quick growing timber – many on the sites of ancient woods. These plantations are reaching financial maturity and are due to be harvested. Now is the time to evaluate these sites and establish how we can bring back centuries of continuous woodland cover and restore the unique ecological relationships that are found in our ancient woods.

Thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Woodland Trust is working together to offer landowners free, professional support to sustainably manage and restore planted ancient woods.

If you own plantation woodland we can help you discover its history and classification. For planted ancient woods, we provide reliable and practical advice on topics including:

- How restoration can complement your on-going woodland business and interests
- How restoration can support forestry certification
- Making the most of grant funding

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**  
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Peter and Brenda Tebby