

Policy Paper

Management of the Estate



WOODLAND
TRUST



The Woodland Trust's approach to managing its Estate

Background

The Woodland Trust owns and cares for well over 1,250 sites covering almost 30,000 hectares (ha) across the UK. This includes more than 4,000ha of ancient semi-natural woodland, almost 4,000ha of non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites and we have created almost 5,000ha of new native woodland. We also manage other valuable habitats such as flower-rich grasslands, heaths, ponds/lakes and moorland.

Around 40% of our sites are within urban areas. The overall site size ranges from our smallest at only 0.04ha to 4,874ha but the Estate is very fragmented with 45% less than 5ha in size. This dispersed geographic nature presents management challenges.

Lineover Wood, Gloucestershire
Adam Burton/WTML



Our strategic vision is:

“A UK rich in native woods and trees for people and wildlife.”

To realise all the environmental, social and economic benefits woods and trees bring to society, we:

- **Create woodland** – championing the need to hugely increase the UK's native woodland and trees.
- **Protect woodland** – fighting to defend native woodland, especially irreplaceable ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees; there should be no loss of ancient woodland.
- **Restore woodland** – ensuring the sensitive restoration of all damaged ancient woodland and the re-creation of native wooded landscapes.



Michael Heffernan/WTML

The common thread running throughout our three aims is people. We put people at the heart of conservation and place significant emphasis on connecting and engaging people with woods and trees in various ways on our Estate. We could not manage our Estate without the support of people – our members and supporters, our neighbours, visitors and our many volunteers.

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving native woodland biodiversity and increasing people’s understanding and enjoyment of woodland. That is what we do – it is what drives and motivates us. The management principles set out here are a practical expression of our wider Conservation Principles.

Phil Formby/WTML



Our Estate plays a key role in helping to address the challenges posed by climate change and the associated nature crisis, tree health and wildlife recovery programmes. It is pro-actively used to demonstrate how we can make a difference.



The mark of responsible forestry

All our sites have a dedicated site manager and there are regular opportunities to comment on our proposals via publicly available management plans. The Estate is managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®).

To us, native woodlands and our sites comprise not just trees, but often complex assemblages of complementary habitats. We actively manage our sites where there is a conservation case and not as isolated reserves but rather holistically in the context of both what is important locally and in the wider landscape.

In managing our woods for biodiversity and people’s enjoyment we seek to offset our costs with income from grant aid, sponsorship and the sale of any wood products that we may produce. However, we will not pursue such income where it could lead to a change in our conservation-driven management objectives or damage the biodiversity or people’s enjoyment of a site.

This approach aims to provide a necessary framework to steer the management of our sites, but management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our site managers' intimate knowledge of each site. We therefore recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should reflect their local landscape, contribute to the development of more resilient landscapes and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives.

To support the approach set out here, we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time. These include, but are not limited to, guidance on the restoration of ancient woodland, timber production, infrastructures in ancient woodland, wildlife management, control of non-native invasive species and tree safety.

Site managers in their decision-making can also draw on our process of site condition assessment to ensure we are enhancing the resilience of our sites in the face of an increasing number of threats including climate change and pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline and oak processionary moth.

Management Principles

- 1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene in our woods when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity, safety and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.**

We decide which features are important on a site and then manage these features to maintain and improve biodiversity, ensure the safety of our visitors and intervene when the evidence suggests it would improve or safeguard the biodiversity and resilience of our sites, and where it is practical and sustainable. We sometimes manage trees by thinning and coppicing them alongside main paths for public benefit and safety in order to maintain and enhance the experience of our sites for visitors.

Equally a decision not to intervene can be regarded as an act of management as much as one to carry out regular silvicultural intervention, provided the decision is based on achieving the stated objectives. For instance where an increase in deadwood or old growth characteristics is desirable, or where no clear benefit to biodiversity or access will occur from intervention, the conscious decision to leave the woodland alone to allow natural processes to take their course may be entirely appropriate. Woodland should only be regarded as unmanaged where no conscious decision has been made about its future, rather than where there is no active intervention.

Colin Varndell/WTML



Healthy woods and trees provide space and necessary resources for the many species reliant on them but in recent decades the abundance of many woodland species has declined. The threats affecting woodlands and their associated species are complex and include:

- Climate change
- Pests and diseases
- Pollution
- Increasing herbivore browsing pressure
- Habitat fragmentation
- Loss of open spaces within woods
- Decline in structural diversity
- Inappropriate woodland management (such as the planting of ancient woodlands with non-native exotics)
- Impacts of some invasive non-native species

We are in a period of increasing impact on woodlands from climate change, extreme weather and changing distribution patterns of species, browsing by deer as well as new pests and diseases. Thus, it is increasingly important we consider the management of our woods in terms of their ability to contribute to wider landscape resilience. This could mean ensuring management of our sites complements or supports other biodiversity requirements identified as important in a local landscape such as deadwood and/or wood pasture management, increasing/maintaining the number of native species present in the area, or seeking to increase the level of natural regeneration and the population(s) of scarcer tree/shrub species.

Michael Heffernan/WTML



Woodland creation at Heartwood
Judith Parry/WTML

- 2. We establish new native woodland for all the positive reasons set out in our Conservation Principles, preferably using natural regeneration but often by planting trees, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.**

We recognise the benefits of natural regeneration and this is our preferred method of creating new native woodland, particularly adjoining existing ancient woodland. However, tree planting offers the opportunity for people to engage directly in woodland creation, and is sometimes the only effective way to establish woodland within reasonable timescales. When planting new native woodland we always carefully consider the impacts on any existing semi-natural habitats. We specify and insist on locally sourced and grown native tree and shrub species through the UK & Ireland Sourced and Grown scheme (UKISG).

- 3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe. Where possible, we pro-actively engage with people to help them appreciate the value of woods and trees.**

The majority of our woods are easy to access and managed for the enjoyment of local communities.

We aim to ensure our sites are immediately and consistently recognisable as owned by the Woodland Trust and as sites to which visitors are welcome and feel safe. We achieve this through providing clear signage and entrances with minimal barriers to the range of users appropriate for the site and through providing infrastructure and management that seeks to ensure a welcoming site to visit. All infrastructure in ancient woodland is carefully risk assessed for its impact.

A few of our larger sites are pro-actively managed to attract even more visitors. Here we encourage, inform and engage visitors with particular features of a site or local interest through interpretation, events or activities and occasionally through the provision of new dedicated features such as those that encourage informal play.

Through increasing our collective understanding and connection with native woodlands, our visitors are more likely to value them. Where sites are remote and access is not easy, we still look to increase people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland by alternative means including innovative use of digital technology like webcams, 360 degree photography and aerial film footage. We are also receptive to other organisations and individuals who wish to undertake activities which promote the responsible use and enjoyment of our sites.

Caledonian woodland at Loch Arkaig
John MacPherson/WTML



4. The long term vision for all our ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.

Ancient woodland is one of our most valuable terrestrial wildlife habitats. Ancient woodland restoration represents the only opportunity to increase the area of ancient woodland with semi-natural characteristics and therefore is a priority for our conservation management. There is often an urgency to commence sensitive restoration of these valuable woodlands to ensure their protection from threats such as competition, year-round dense shade, invasive non-natives and pests and diseases. The long-term aim is to restore and enhance the ecological integrity and resilience of native wooded landscapes.

Non-native trees are an important element of the total forest estate of the UK. We often retain an element of non-native trees in our own woods where they pose no threat and in doing so seek to manage such stands in the medium term to provide an economic return. However, in general and in line with our Conservation Principles and best restoration and reversion practice, we always do gradually convert these sites to predominantly native woodland.



Fingle Woods, Devon
Ben Lee/WTML

5. Existing semi-natural open ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.

Woodland rides, glades, unimproved grassland, ponds, upland bogs, marsh and water courses act as important habitats for many species. We restore, protect and maintain these habitats within our sites where practical and sustainable, particularly where they are part of wider landscape scale habitat networks.

We also consider the creation of new open ground habitats as part of wider landscape scale habitat initiatives, to enhance the biodiversity value of our sites, or to aid the sustainable management of areas of existing semi-natural open ground habitats. However our habitat creation work is primarily focused on the creation of new woodland.

Where non-native trees have been planted on important semi-natural open ground habitat we restore the area to open ground where practical and its future management is sustainable.



6. The natural and cultural heritage value of sites is taken into account in our management and in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.

Woods and trees have been an important part of community life for thousands of years. Ancient woods, wood-pasture, trees outside woods, parkland, urban trees, hedgerows and ancient trees give clues to the way our ancestors lived that have often disappeared from urban and farmed landscapes. We consider the past without being unduly constrained by it. We recognise the importance of the historic and cultural environment, in particular how ancient trees often bridge the gap between representing features of both historical, amenity and immense biodiversity value.

We take action to conserve Scheduled Monuments, listed buildings and other significant historic and cultural features. We try to make these accessible and provide information on them to visitors.

Ancient trees have a special biodiversity value and we champion their role. Many of the characteristic species reliant on ancient trees and deadwood are rare and declining, and are poor colonisers. We prevent damage and counteract the threat to ancient trees wherever possible, avoiding compaction or root damage and reducing shading by sensitively thinning around the tree. Where ancient trees pose a potential hazard to people, we will reroute paths wherever possible as the main method of reducing risk. We aim to recruit and promote the next generation of ancient trees on our sites, as well as looking to increase the range and amounts of deadwood.

Hackfall, Yorkshire
David Rodway/WTML

7. Land and woods can generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We therefore consider the appropriateness of opportunities to generate income from our Estate to help support our aims.

As a charity the Trust has an obligation to be a good steward of its assets. We are mindful of the potential of our Estate to generate an income over and above that which may result from our biodiversity and public access management objectives. Wood production, the sale of natural and marketable products such as carbon, the use of our sites for events and sponsorship are examples of activities which can generate a net income to be reinvested in our core work. Some other obvious ecosystem services offered by woodlands to wider society such as health benefits, flood alleviation and natural capital are yet to be monetised by markets and truly valued by society.

However, we avoid activities that may prejudice our primary aims of conserving woodlands and encouraging public enjoyment. In wishing to be good stewards of our assets we must be wary of carrying out income-generating activities which appear to offer a return but in fact are uneconomic. Income-generating activities or initiatives must therefore be carried out sensitively, be genuinely sustainable and provide a positive financial return.

Harvesting at Wentwood, Wales
Geoff Caddick/WTML



Burntollet Wood, East of Londonderry, Northern Ireland
Press Eye Photography/WTML

8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we encourage our woods to be used for local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.

We involve local people and organisations in the development of the management plans for our sites and in the design of woodland creation sites. Local people are also made aware of high-impact operations through the use of information posters, our website, guided walks or through direct contact. Multiple local, regional and national communication channels are used to promote further information about our work and sites to a wider audience and to encourage visitors.

We work in partnership with adjoining landowners with similar objectives to us to effect landscape scale change for much more positive and powerful benefits either through direct management or collaboration, influence and advice. We follow the principles of “bigger, better, more and joined-up” to build resilient landscapes.

We are open to collaboration, actively seek to build effective partnerships and thus welcome requests to use our woods. We regularly host activities such as forest schools, exercise clubs, woodland skills training and management initiatives, orienteering clubs, community orchards and support species re-introduction programmes on our Estate.

We value the support and skills our many volunteers provide, from undertaking ecological surveys, running events and guided walks, to keeping a watchful eye on their local woods and assisting our site managers.

We recognise the value and potential for local people and organisations to take a greater stake in the management of our Estate and are therefore open to transferring sites into their care and management. This is subject to ensuring that wider local benefits provided by those sites remain protected or are enhanced. We have handed on the management of over 1,000ha of our Estate to other parties who share our vision such as community groups and other conservation organisations.

9. We use and offer the Estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. We maintain a network of sites for long-term monitoring and trials leading to reductions in plastics and pesticides.

The Estate acts as the shop window for our vision for UK woodlands as part of wider resilient landscapes and as such it needs to contribute to the demonstration and promotion of that vision. Our diverse Estate also needs to play its role in providing a backdrop for communicating conservation messages, act as a helpful marketing tool for corporate partnerships and host research and monitoring opportunities, both for the Woodland Trust to gather evidence on areas of interest, as well as provide opportunities for others to carry out such work.

Our aim is to deliver a programme of demonstration, long-term monitoring and systematic evidence gathering at a suite of selected sites in key locations. We invest in these sites to demonstrate our primary communications and advocacy messages with the aim to further our work with other land managers and our ability to influence others, particularly landowners, their representative organisations and Government agencies.

In demonstrating our vision for woodlands we may carry out activities that are not strictly necessary to maintain or enhance the biodiversity value of our Estate but which will enable us to encourage others to take action we wish to see, for example reconciling timber production with the restoration of ancient woodland or incorporating wood production within our woodland creation activities. We recognise that some objectives may not be

complementary, such as game management with public access.

We strive to build our evidence base and monitor the impact of our activities via an annual internal Estate Performance Report. We also wish to make our Estate more widely available for others to use for research and demonstration purposes. On selected sites we trial new techniques and tools in an attempt to help us and others solve challenges; for example alternatives to plastic tree guards and over-reliance on pesticides.

In all such activities we strive not to undertake action that will prejudice the biodiversity management or public enjoyment of our Estate, nor will we allow others to do so as part of their research or demonstration activities.

10. Any activities we undertake are in line with our wider Conservation Principles, conform to sustainable forest management practices, are appropriate for the site and balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and certified with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) through independent audit. All our sites have a management plan which is publicly available via our website and regularly consulted on. We ensure any management objectives we set within our plans will be regularly reviewed along with the ecological and tree health condition of our sites.

We have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time. These include guidance on the restoration of ancient woodland, wildlife management, provenance, woodland creation and tree safety.

We review our management practices and policies against sector best practice and the latest information and evidence regarding land management for conservation and access objectives.

We aim to ensure any work carried out on the Estate, whether by contractors or volunteers, is to the highest standards and we will continue to work with our contractors and volunteers to ensure these standards are maintained or improved.



In summary the following principles help to direct the management of our Estate

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- 2. We establish new native woodland for all the positive reasons set out in our Conservation Principles, preferably using natural regeneration but often by planting trees, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.**
- 3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe. Where possible, we pro-actively engage with people to help them appreciate the value of woods and trees.**
- 4. The long term vision for all our ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.**
- 5. Existing semi-natural open ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.**
- 6. The natural and cultural heritage value of sites is taken into account in our management and in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.**
- 7. Land and woods can generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We therefore consider the appropriateness of opportunities to generate income from our Estate to help support our aims.**
- 8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we encourage our woods to be used for local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.**
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