

Willesley Wood

(Plan period – 2022 to 2027)



WOODLAND
TRUST

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Introduction to the Woodland Trust Estate

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 and almost 4,000ha of non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites and we have created over 5,000ha of new native woodland. We also manage other valuable habitats such as flower-rich grasslands, heaths, ponds/lakes and moorland.

Our 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 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.

Management of the Woodland Trust Estate

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

The following principles provide an overarching framework to guide the management of all our sites but we recognise that all woods are different and that their management also needs to reflect their local landscape, history and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives.

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.
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.
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.
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.

The Public Management Plan

This public management plan describes the site and sets out the long term aims for our management and lists the Key Features which drive our management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with our long, 50 years and beyond, and our short, the next 5 years, term objectives for the management and enhancement of these features. The short term objectives are complemented by an outline Work Programme for the period of this management plan aimed at delivering our management aims.

Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and we continually monitor our sites to assess the success of our management, therefore this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme.

Please either consult The Woodland Trust website

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

or contact the Woodland Trust

operations@woodlandtrust.org.uk

to confirm details of the current management programme.

A short glossary of technical terms can be found at the end of the plan.

Location and Access

Location maps and directions for how to find and access our woods, including this site, can be found by using the following link to the Woodland Trust web-site which contains information on accessible woodlands across the UK

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/find-woods/>

In Scotland access to our sites is in accordance with the Land Reform Act (of Scotland) 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

In England, Wales and NI, with the exception of designated Public Rights of Ways, all routes across our sites are permissive in nature and where we have specific access provision for horse riders and/or cyclists this will be noted in the management plan.

The Management Plan

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GLOSSARY

1. SITE DETAILS

Willesley Wood

Location:

Ashby de la Zouch Grid reference: SK333142 OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 128

Area:

56.60 hectares (139.86 acres)

External Designations:

Local Nature Reserve, National Forest

Internal Designations:

Welcoming Sites Programme

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Willesley Wood is a 58 hectare property situated within the Heart of National Forest adjacent to the village of Donisthorpe, approximately 2 miles south west of Ashby-de-la Zouch. Willesley Wood is part of the Leicestershire Coalfield area having a history of deep and open cast mining activity the latter ceasing in 1943 at Willesley when the land was then returned to agriculture. The Coalfield is an area of gently undulating land form, dominated by mixed farmland.

The areas industrial heritage is never far away and visible relics include old colliery sites such as the Oakthorpe colliery adjacent to Willesley, and the subsidence flash seen within the boundaries of the site. The geology of the area consists of layers of younger Carboniferous and Triassic rocks, including sandstone's and Carboniferous Limestone. Soils in the area are predominantly neutral clayey loams.

Willesley is comprised of 4 main areas; new plantation, mature secondary woodland, grassland and wetland.

Planting at Willesley Wood originally took place over a 3-year period from 1991-1994. The plantation is primarily on the north and south slopes of the gentle valley running east to west and has been designed to accentuate the valley shape and form with the lake as the central feature. Planting is predominantly oak / ash with faster growing silver birch, willow and cherry planted in a block structure. Field maple, guelder rose and holly are situated towards the outside edges of the planting areas. Broad rides break up the areas of planting over the whole site and provide ease of access for walking.

A grove dedicated to the Royal British Legion was planted in 2002. It was originally planted with a very high proportion of Ash (85%). Unfortunately, ash die back took hold and the majority of these trees succumbed and the decision was made to fell the ash component and replant with hornbeam, birch and alder in 2022.

The area formerly known as Willesley Ext to the south of the property (compartment 4a) was planted with mixed broadleaves in the Spring of 2003. The bulk of the 16.59 hectares was planted but the compartment also includes two small areas of older woodland, at opposite ends of the Green Lane, which enclose former, now capped, mine-shafts.

Secondary Woodland (11 acre wood) and Shelter Belt can be found in the southern half of Willesley Wood. These areas are semi-mature secondary woodland; main canopy species include ash with oak and sycamore, with an under storey of hawthorn, holly and elder. The middle of 11acre wood is quite wet and contains a drainage channel with species including grey, white and goat willow with common alder and several hybrid poplars. Of particular interest in this area is the native Black Poplar (spp. *Betulifolia*). The mature secondary woodland areas have ancient woodland ground flora associated with them such as pendulous sedge, bluebell and dogs mercury. The question has been raised as to whether or not Willesley was at one time host to areas of extensive ancient woodland, however the earliest maps dating from 1781 to 1887 show no woodland on the site, the 1887 O.S map shows it to be entirely marshland and hedgerow-farmland.

Later O.S maps show the progressive development of woodland in the marshland from 1887 to 1923. From this information and other sources it can be concluded that Willesley wood was originally;

- Farmland, probably pasture.
- Had extensive hedgerows and wayside trees.
- Had some gorse heath-land.
- Had some plantation woodland.
- The site subsequently developed into marshland, possibly following subsidence caused by mining locally and has since progressed to woodland over the last 100 years.
- Grassland / meadow

The main grassland area at Willesley Wood is situated to the north of Thortit Lake, the area is mown once a year with all arisings collected and taken from site. This has enabled a diverse enough array of wildflower species to develop, earning this patch of open ground a Local Wildlife Site status. Species of interest include Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) and Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*). The habitat is valuable for Lepidoptera and other insects.

The Saltersford Brook enters the site from Willesley lake on the eastern boundary under the road and forms a wide, linear water feature leading into another 100 metres of culvert before opening out and entering Thortit lake. It exits the site on the western boundary through another culvert beneath the council recreation site (formerly Oakthorpe Colliery) and feeding further lakes at Saltersford Recreation Area before entering the River Mease, a SSSI and SAC. To the south of the brook near the entrance is an open parkland area of Sycamore, Alder and Ash with extensive nettle / thistle beds which are especially attractive to butterflies.

Thortit lake was formed in the early 1980's by gradual subsidence caused by the old mining works. The lake is shallow and is surrounded by marginal wetland fringes important to amphibians and water fowl.

The Key Features of the site are Secondary Woodland, Mixed Habitat Mosaic, Informal Public Access, New Native Woodland and Connecting People with Woods and Trees.

3. LONG TERM POLICY

Willesley Wood will be managed predominantly as High Forest the intention being to develop a sustainable, resilient, self-regenerating woodland habitat consisting of a variety of tree species of varying age classes within the canopy and the promotion and protection of associated flora and fauna. Standing and falling dead wood will be maintained other than where it is a health and safety issue.

Where possible an attempt will be made to secure an income from any thinning or harvesting operations to help offset the cost of said operations.

Cuttings taken from the Black Poplar and placed in close proximity to the donor trees and into the 2002 area of planting will be favoured and encouraged to grow and develop as part of future management processes.

Thortit Lake and the wetland area along the lake margins will be allowed to follow largely natural processes with minimum management intervention and will be monitored to ensure its continued health.

Grassland areas on site will continue to be cut regularly. The large area of grassland adjacent to the lake will be cut annually in late summer or autumn.

The importance of the wood as an integral part of the National Forest is also recognized through the upkeep of paths and rides and the provision of on site interpretation; this will be maintained in perpetuity. Partnership working with the National Forest Company, Leicestershire County Council, local people and others will also continue in perpetuity and will remain a key aim of the property.

Willesley Wood will be a priority site for the Woodland Trust in the National Forest. It will be treasured by local communities and visiting tourists alike, and will be a wood through which we successfully connect people to woods and trees and our wider cause messaging, as well as enabling us to have a strong brand presence in the forest.

The wood will be used by various groups, both in an independent and facilitated manner, often assisted by a small group of dedicated volunteers. Forest schools, primary school groups, local wildlife specialists, walkers and families will all benefit from a high quality visitor offer, which will include interpretation that highlights the historical and wildlife interest of the site.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 f1 Secondary Woodland

Description
The 11-acre wood is a wet woodland typified by alder and poplar and is of secondary origin. The area is damp in places with ditches running southeast to northwest. Black poplar is a notable feature here. The understorey is dominated in places by hawthorn, with much of the ground remaining shaded and barren. Bramble exists in some of the well-lit areas. Pendulous sedge, bluebell, dogs mercury, wood anemone and Goldilocks buttercup can also be found.
Significance
Wet woodland of ancient semi-natural origin now extends over only 30ha in Leicestershire and Rutland. Secondary wet woodland has not been catalogued but the combined total area of these is not thought to exceed 40ha. Wet woodland is also a rare habitat at a national level and a National Forest BAP target habitat.
Opportunities & Constraints
<p>Opportunities: Wet woodlands hold species-rich plant communities, with a number of species of county importance. Rare invertebrates are also well represented, especially beetles and craneflies. Our main opportunity was in protecting this woodland (as a result of the Woodland Trust owning it in perpetuity) and with management encouraging it to develop into a more varied woodland, which contains a mixture of trees species, age classes and ground flora diversity.</p> <p>Constraints; The woodland is very wet and this needs to be born in mind in relation to any forestry operations undertaken within the woodland both from a practical and habitat conservation perspective. A number of ditches and wet flushes are present within this area.</p>
Factors Causing Change
Ash die back is present on site and although recent harvesting operations on site have managed this, it will continue to be an issue in the future.
Long term Objective (50 years+)
To be managed as high forest the intention being to encourage the on-going resilience and sustainability of the woodland and its associated flora and fauna through encouraging a range of tree species types of varying age classes primarily through the promotion of natural regeneration. All large old trees and resulting dead wood will be retained. Wind blown trees will be left in situ and allowed to decompose naturally where it is safe to do so. This will provide potentially rich habitat for lichen, fungi, invertebrates and other woodland fauna including suitable habitat for bat roosts. Periodic thinning and harvesting operations based on the Woodland Condition Assessments will take place in 11-acre wood and will be used as a tool to promote the above. Any thinning work is likely to take place once every 8 to 15 years based on assessment.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

To carry out a 10% thin of stems within the woodland favouring species other than ash for retention the aim being to increase light levels and encourage / release pockets of natural regeneration in 2024.

To carry out an ecological survey of the woodland to identify areas of interest to inform thinning operations in 2023.

4.2 f2 Mixed Habitat Mosaic

Description

Thortit Lake was formed in the early 1980s by subsidence caused by old mine workings. The lake is approximately 3-4 feet deep. The lake edge consists of marginal reeds and rushes, Wood clubrush (*Scirpus sylvaticus*) is present and is rare in the county. Bullrush is abundant and spreading and the area is being invaded by willow scrub in places. Another area of the lakeside marginal vegetation is dominated by carr-like scrub, predominantly willow and alder. A marshy area intergrades with the carr and is predominantly wetland herbaceous vegetation, which then leads into flower rich grassland. This is a sheltered area close to the old mine shafts. The area grades from the marsh and lake edge at the north and contains such species as common spotted and southern marsh orchids. Some willow and alder scrub is beginning to encroach into the area.

The open meadow to the north of the lake has a good display of wildflowers including southern marsh orchids. Other species here include field scabious, buttercup, meadowsweet, cuckooflower to name but a few, as well as a good range of grasses.

Significance

The wetland area was featured at Parish level habitat in the evaluation of 1979 being scarce habitat in the county. A good wetland herb layer also exists here including *Filipendula ulmaria* and *Typha angustifolia*.

The larger meadow area has the designation of a Local Wildlife Site. This is due to the presence of a relatively diverse range of wildflowers here. Although no species is particularly rare or exclusive, the range of species is large enough to be not common in this area.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities

Monitoring and where required management of these areas should enable a diverse structure of habitats to be retained while at the same time maintaining habitat for wildfowl including nesting areas for coot, grebe and swan. The bullrush also provides floating mats, which provide good habitat for some invertebrates. The potential for reed bed habitat here is limited due to the smallness of the area and the absence of Common reed (*Phragmites*).

Constraints

Silting of Thortit lake. Dogs that are not kept under control can affect nesting birds as can mink which are known in the local area.

Dog mess in the wildflower meadow makes it harder to find a contractor willing to cut this area for hay and hence remove the arisings.
Factors Causing Change
Natural Succession to willow and birch scrub, Silting up of Thortit lake
Long term Objective (50 years+)
To maintain the diverse structure of habitats of lake, lakeside margin, scrub willow 'carr', marsh floodplain and the area of flower rich grassland.
Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)
The flower rich grassland will be mown annually in September. Carry out a full ecological survey of the wetland and grassland habitats to determine current condition of this area and to inform future management in 2024.

4.3 f5 New Native Woodland

Description
<p>Willesley Wood consists primarily of new native woodland plantation planted over a 3-year period from 1991-1994. The plantation is primarily on the north and south slopes of the gentle valley running east to west and was designed to accentuate the valley shape and form with the lake as the central feature. Planting is predominantly oak / ash with faster growing silver birch, willow and cherry planted in a block structure. Field maple, guelder rose and holly are situated towards the outside edges of the planting areas.</p> <p>2002 saw the planting of a 1 hectare block of native woodland in-conjunction with the Royal British Legion which contains a grove with a bench and memorial stone. In 2019 it was noted that the majority of the ash in this grove were showing advanced symptoms of ADB and the decision was made to remove all ash showing ADB and replant. This was completed in 2022. Restocking was with birch, hornbeam and alder.</p> <p>In 2003 a second 16.59 hectare area was planted at Willesley Wood and was formerly know as Willesley Extension, this was planted with mixed broadleaves in the Spring of 2003. The bulk of this area consists of plantation but the compartment also includes 2 small areas of woodland at opposite ends of the Green Lane which enclose former, now capped, mine shafts and ancient woodland ground flora indicator species including wood anemone, wood sorrel and bluebells.</p>
Significance
The new native plantation is a considerable addition to the Heart of the National Forest area, improving biodiversity through habitat creation and providing an important place for recreation for the general public. It also contributes a great deal along with similar schemes in the area in beautifying what was once an industrially scarred landscape.
Opportunities & Constraints

<p>Opportunities:</p> <p>To work in partnership with the National Forest Company, Local People / Groups, The Forestry Commission and Leicestershire County Council on habitat improvement and commercial thinning / harvesting operations.</p> <p>Constraints:</p> <p>Lack of infrastructure associated with harvesting operations.</p> <p>The area can get very wet in the winter months.</p> <p>Ash Die Back is present and prevalent through the new woodland stands although thinning works in 2019 took this into account and ash that are next to paths have been reduced in numbers.</p>
<p>Factors Causing Change</p>
<p>Ash Die Back - Prevalent through stands of the plantation. Even though recent harvesting works have addressed this disease throughout the woodland, it will continue to have a significant impact going forward into the future.</p>
<p>Long term Objective (50 years+)</p>
<p>To promote the development of diverse, resilient high forest with a mix of species and age classes capable of regenerating naturally. Thinning and Harvesting works based on the Woodland Condition Assessments and which will involve collaborative working with local organisations and groups including the National Forest Company, will be used as tools to promote the sustainable and resilient development of the woodland habitat. Any thinning work will likely take place in the short to medium term once every 5 to 10 years based on assessment.</p>
<p>Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)</p>
<p>To carry out a Woodland Condition Assessment at the start of the next Management Plan Review in 2027.</p> <p>To monitor the health of the young woodland. Tie in with WCA.</p>

4.4 f5 Connecting People with woods & trees

<p>Description</p>
<p>Access/Infrastructure</p> <p>Willesley Wood was planted in the mid 1990s, with an extension created in 2003, forming a 58 hectare site within the Heart of the National Forest. The main access to the site is via the Oakthorpe Colliery Picnic Site and car park, located off Willesley Lane/Ashby Road and managed by the local County Council. In addition there are 9 other entrance points into the wood. There are three welcome and interpretation panels, one at each of the oakthorpe colliery entrances and one from the largest entrance at Willesley Woodside. A public footpath runs diagonally across the site. There is a large, circular surfaced path that runs in a loop around the lake and through 11 acre wood. Currently the paths are predominantly grass tracks which can become very muddy during winter and in periods of wet weather.</p> <p>General communication drivers</p> <p>Willesley Wood is located to the southwest of Ashby-de-la-zouch, in the Heart of the National Forest in Leicestershire. It</p>

is close to the villages of Donisthorpe, Moira and Measham, and the cities of Leicester, Derby, Nottingham and Birmingham are all within a 1 hour drive. Anecdotally, we know that the majority of visitors to the site are dog walkers, along with a proportion of long-distance walkers. Some specialist interest groups, including botany groups, have been known to visit, and the Ashby Royal British Legion visit the memorial grove a few times each year. The scouts from the nearby camp have visited in the past, and some volunteers from the National Forest Woodfuel Group have an agreement with the WT to work in certain areas of the wood. Detailed information on the visitor base and numbers is not available. However, it is useful to consider the composition of the surrounding communities that could feasibly be existing or potential sources of visitors.

The features of the site that provide interest are as follows:

The lake in the centre of the site acts as a natural focal point for visitors when walking through the wood.

The meadow areas are home to some note-worthy species, including orchids, meadow cranesbill and corncockle and are also havens for butterflies and other pollinators

The area has a rich industrial heritage and remnants of this can be seen across Willesley Wood.

A memorial grove for the Royal British Legion

The current visitor offer at Willesley Wood is a low key one, and reflects the Trusts original intention of creating places for quiet, informal recreation. The wood is quiet and networks of paths allow people to explore and experience independently without guidance or facilitation from the WT.

Although not connected to it, there is a national trail (Ivanhoe Way) that passes approximately one kilometre to the west of the wood. The surrounding footpath network is generally good, with rights of way connecting Willesley to neighbouring Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe and Moira.

The Woodland Trust has 17 other sites within the National Forest, the closest being Woodcote, Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Wood, Top Wood, Penguin Wood and Foxley Wood. The National Forest covers 200 square miles of the Midlands (Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire) and is transforming the landscape via woodland creation with the aim of linking the two ancient Forests of Charnwood on its Eastern fringe with Needwood Forest to its West. The National Forest Company is leading the creation of the forest, with a vast array of partners also contributing.

Events

The Woodland Trust currently runs an annual volunteer led guided walk at Willesley as part of the National Forest Walking Festival.

Volunteering

There is currently 1 volunteer formally attached to the site, in the capacity of Woodland Warden.

Schools

As far as we are aware, the site is not currently used by schools, but there are many close by:

Donisthorpe Primary School, Moira Primary School, Albert Village Community Primary School, Oakthorpe Primary School, Blackfordby St Margarets C of E Primary School, Ashby Willesley Primary School, Measham C of E Primary School, Woodcote Primary School, Willesley County Primary School, Packington C of E Primary School, Ashby Hill Top Primary School, Ivanhoe College, Lewis Charlton School, Manor House School

There are also a number of nurseries, play groups etc that operate locally.

In particular, Donisthorpe Primary School is very close to Willesley Wood, but there is no safe walking route to access the site currently. Oakthorpe School is also very close, and may be able to access Willesley on foot using the PROW network.

Significance

As already mentioned, Willesley Wood is located in the Heart of the National Forest, and provides an important free, accessible woodland as part of the wider National Forest landscape. The Woodland Trust has a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Forest Company, so sites such as Willesley will remain a key part of our regional portfolio going forward. Its links to the areas industrial mining heritage are a valuable asset; the National Forest as a whole is a brilliant example of landscape scale change. 30 years ago the landscape was largely characterised by the remains of the once predominant open-cast mining industry, with very little woodland or accessible green space. Now the area has a plethora of thriving woods for both local communities and, increasingly, visiting tourists to enjoy. The remnants of the mining industry that are present at Willesley Wood are an important reminder of and link to its past. Significantly, Willesley was the location for the planting of the very first tree associated with the creation of the National Forest back in 1991.

It is a popular site with walkers (with and without dogs) and its good links via the PROW network to the wider National Forest are a real strength. In addition, the presence of the Royal British Legion "Rest and Remember" grove provides a calm oasis among the hubbub of the Heart of the Forest.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:

Access/Infrastructure

As part of the Black to Green project, the NFC installed an interpretive feature in an area adjacent to Willesley Wood, just up from the picnic area and car park. This is close to what has become our primary entrance.

General Comms Drivers

There is much scope to build on and maximise the location of Willesley Wood within the Heart of the National Forest; something we don't necessarily make the most of currently.

Volunteering

There may be opportunity to recruit further Woodland Warden type roles. Additionally, the National Forest should be considered as a focus for wider WT initiatives, such as Observatree.

Schools

As Oakthorpe Primary School is potentially within walking distance of the site, there is real potential to establish a relationship with them. Promoting the GTSA to all of the nearest schools would be worthwhile, and the site could be considered for use by small forest schools groups

We should continue to work closely with the National Forest Company to maximise mutual benefit and seek opportunities to work in partnership to further our similar aims/objectives.

Constraints:

Access/Infrastructure

Timeframes may be a key consideration for elements, to ensure we are linking in with wider National Forest activity at an appropriate time.

Staff capacity to lead on and deliver on-the-ground work is another factor to be aware of.

Events

No current plans to expand our events programme. We welcome third party events where appropriate.

Volunteering

Staff capacity to directly manage further volunteers is limited.

Schools

Lack of onsite facilities and limited parking will potentially be a barrier to engaging with schools – shorter sessions, along with working those that are closest to the wood would overcome this to a degree.

Staff capacity to invest the necessary time to build relationships with schools will be limited (FS could potentially be run as a third party use of the site).

Wider community engagement

Staff capacity may be limited to lead on this; we need to find our place within an area that already has a lot of alternative engagement offers.

Factors Causing Change

The National Forest Company are striving to realise the National Forest as a destination area within the midlands and the wider country, and has a strong emphasis on growing the tourism industry throughout the forest area which attracts 9 million visitors a year. This has resulted in increased visits from further afield, and we will need to be ready for this in terms of our visitor experience and offer, and how we potentially package ourselves up with other nearby facilities.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Willesley Wood will be a priority site for the Woodland Trust in the National Forest. It will be treasured by local communities and visiting tourists alike, and will be a wood through which we successfully connect people to woods and trees and our wider cause messaging, as well as enabling us to have a strong brand presence in the forest.

The wood will be used by various groups, both in an independent and facilitated manner, often assisted by a small group of dedicated volunteers. Forest schools, primary school groups, local wildlife specialists, walkers and families will all benefit from a high quality visitor offer, which will include interpretation that highlights the historical and wildlife interest of the site.

People will value Willesley as an escape from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the Heart of the Forest, and will be somewhere for people to connect with and experience wildlife and the natural world, soak up the tranquil atmosphere and find reflection in the British Legion Grove.

Willesley Wood will be a core part of the Heart of the Forest experience, and will work alongside nearby Hicks Lodge and others to offer fabulous days out for a variety of audiences, from both near and afar.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Access provision will be in keeping with WT access guidelines. Achieved by ensuring that:
Entrances & signage are welcoming to visitors and well cared for (annually).
All managed paths are kept reasonably well-drained and free from encroaching vegetation, and that access infrastructure and boundaries etc. are kept in good order (annually).
The site is kept safe and welcoming by: repair of vandalism (when needed); clearing of fallen trees where access is obstructed (as needed); and regular site safety surveys (as per risk assessment).
Entrances are as accessible as possible and suitable for the visitor profile of the site.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
2022	NWH - Maintenance Work	Works associated with the maintenance of non-woodland habitats – mechanical management, hay cutting, fence and wall maintenance etc	August
2022	SL - H&S Signage	Provision of on-site signage both temporary and permanent to alert visitor to safety risks or measures	October
2022	PE - Interpretation & Signage	Works associated with the provision of visitor signage, waymarking, interpretation features and leaflets	October
2022	SL - Tree Safety Emergency Work	Work associated with unplanned emergency tree safety works – such as clearance of fallen trees/branches and associated repairs	November
2023	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone A	Work associated with planned tree safety works alongside areas such as car parks, roadsides and boundaries	February
2023	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone A	Work associated with planned tree safety works alongside areas such as car parks, roadsides and boundaries	March
2023	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	June
2023	CS - Ecological Survey & Assessment	Use of external consultants to support the provision of ecological surveys, assessment and biodiversity / species monitoring	June
2023	NWH - Maintenance Work	Works associated with the maintenance of non-woodland habitats – mechanical management, hay cutting, fence and wall maintenance etc	August
2024	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	June
2024	NWH - Maintenance Work	Works associated with the maintenance of non-woodland habitats – mechanical management, hay cutting, fence and wall maintenance etc	August
2024	WMM - Secondary Silviculture	Works associated with silvicultural operations within secondary woods to meet our primary aims of conserving woodlands and encouraging public enjoyment– such as the removal of non-natives, thinning and	September

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
		promotion of native trees and shrubs, creating and managing view points and providing welcoming sites for visitors	
2025	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	June
2025	NWH - Maintenance Work	Works associated with the maintenance of non-woodland habitats – mechanical management, hay cutting, fence and wall maintenance etc	August

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	29.35	Oak (pedunculate)	1992	High forest	People issues (+tve & -tve)	National Forest
<p>This area is predominantly tree planted blocks. Major species include oak, ash, silver birch, willow species. Lesser species are guelder rose, field maple and holly. Cherry was also planted but has suffered high mortality, suspected to be caused by bacterial canker.</p> <p>A 1ha block was planted in February 2002 situated to the north of the 11-acre are of mature woodland, this forms part of Ashby de la Zouch's Royal British Legion Remembrance area and is used by them periodically throughout the year. Species planted include ash, oak, hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel. Black poplar cutting were also taken from the mature trees in the existing mature woodland. Ash die back was unfortunately prevalent throughout the young ash trees in this area so the decision was made to clear fell the ash and replant. this happened from 2020-2022.</p> <p>Open areas of grassland are also located within this compartment, dominated by coarse grasses with locally dominant thistles, docks and nettles. Some rare species are also present such as Corncockle (<i>Agrostemma githago</i>) and Meadow cranesbill (<i>Geranium pratense</i>).Hedgerows surround the site and are mostly 2-5 metres tall.</p> <p>The hedgerows along the north and western boundaries are the most complete with few gaps. They are unusual in having very few hawthorn, but a lot of hazel and field maple. It is possible that they are pre-enclosure features.</p>						
2a	6.69	Ash	1920	High forest	Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, Mostly wet ground/exposed site	Local Nature Reserve, National Forest
<p>Compartment 2 is an area of mature secondary woodland. It is split into four areas, 11acre wood and a shelterbelt on the south-western boundary and two small woods in the former "extension" area (compartment 4a). Predominant species is ash with some oak and poplar. Sycamore is common along the boundary edges and towards the west. The area is damp in places with ditches running southeast to northwest throughout the main block.</p> <p>Black poplar is a notable feature, probably following pre-existing hedge lines through the 11acre wood. The understorey is dominated in places by hawthorn, with much of the ground remaining shaded and barren. Bramble exists in some of the well-lit areas. Pendulous sedge, bluebell, dog's mercury, wood anemone and goldilocks buttercup.</p> <p>The shelterbelt on the south-western boundary is made up of oak, ash, sycamore, and poplar hybrids. The area was probably planted to conceal the buildings of Oakthorpe Colliery and Ashby canal basin in the early 19th century. Some of the old ash has potential for bat roosts. Hawthorn and elder form the main understorey species.</p>						

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
3a	5.14	Goat willow	1970	Min-intervention	Mostly wet ground/exposed site	Local Nature Reserve, National Forest

Compartment 3 is made up of the lake and immediate areas of surrounding land. The lake, lakeside margin, scrub willow 'carr', marsh, floodplain and part of an area of flower rich grassland are all included within this compartment (see conservation map for exact locations).

Thortit Lake was formed in the early 1980's by subsidence caused by old mine workings. The lake is approximately 3-4 feet deep. The area is made up of marginal reeds and rushes, Wood clubrush (*Scirpus sylvaticus*) is present and is rare in the county. Bullrush is abundant and spreading and the area is being invaded by willow scrub in places. The willow 'carr' area is essentially lakeside marginal vegetation and is dominated by carr-like scrub, predominantly willow and alder. The area was featured at 'Parish' level habitat in the evaluation of 1979 being scarce habitat in the county.

A good wetland herb layer exists here including Meadow Sweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Reed mace (*Typha angustifolia*). Marsh; This area intergrades with the 'carr' and is predominantly wetland herbaceous vegetation. Floodplain; This is an inundation zone bordering the lake and dominated by ruderal species. Flower-rich grassland; This is a sheltered area close to the old mine shafts. The area grades from the marsh and lake edge at the north and contains such species as common spotted and southern marsh orchids. Some willow and alder scrub is beginning to encroach into the area.

4a	15.56	Ash	2003	High forest		National Forest
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This compartment is predominantly new planting which was undertaken in the Spring of 2003. The 13.15 ha area was planted with 25,000 trees and 4,000 shrubs. The species distribution was Ash 50%, Oak 12.5%, Field maple 5%, Silver birch 4%, Hawthorn 2%, Blackthorn 2%, Purging buckthorn 2%, Guelder rose 4% and Hazel 4%. The compartment also contains 2 rows of Giant Redwood (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), 21 trees in all, planted as a belated millennium feature designed to be visible from the nearby A42 trunk road.

The northern section of the compartment was used as a trial for organic planting which did not involve the use of herbicides. The trees were planted through a continuous strip of mulch-mat which was then covered by inert wood chip compost. As a consequence of this method of planting the spacing was 3m x 1.5m as opposed to the standard 2.1 x 2.1 which was used on the rest of the compartment.

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woods are defined as those where there has been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. In Scotland ancient woods are defined strictly as sites shown as semi-natural woodland on the 'Roy' maps (a military survey carried out in 1750 AD, which is the best source of historical map evidence) and as woodland all subsequent maps. However, they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to take account of uncertainties in their identification. Ancient woods include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (see below). May support many species that are only found in ancient woodland.

Ancient Semi - Natural Woodland

Stands in ancient woods defined as those consisting predominantly of native trees and shrubs that have not obviously been planted, which have arisen from natural regeneration or coppice regrowth.

Ancient Woodland Site

Stands in ancient woods that have been converted to plantations, of coniferous, broadleaved or mixed species, usually for timber production, including plantations of native species planted so closely together that any semi-natural elements of the understorey have been suppressed.

Beating Up

Replacing any newly planted trees that have died in the first few years after planting.

Broadleaf

A tree having broad leaves (such as oak) rather than needles found on conifers (such as Scots pine).

Canopy

The uppermost layer of vegetation in a woodland, or the upper foliage and branches of an individual tree.

Clearfell

Felling of all trees within a defined area.

Compartment

Permanent management division of a woodland, usually defined on site by permanent features such as roads. See Sub-compartments.

Conifer

A tree having needles, rather than broadleaves, and typically bearing cones.

Continuous Cover forestry

A term used for managing woods to ensure that there are groups or individual trees of different ages scattered over the whole wood and that some mature tree cover is always maintained. Management is by repeated thinning and no large areas are ever completely felled all at once.

Coppice

Trees which are cut back to ground levels at regular intervals (3-25 years).

Exotic (non-native) Species

Species originating from other countries (or other parts of the UK) that have been introduced by humans, deliberately or accidentally.

Field Layer

Layer of small, non-woody herbaceous plants such as bluebells.

Group Fell

The felling of a small group of trees, often to promote natural regeneration or allow planting.

Long Term Retention

Discrete groups of trees (or in some cases single trees) that are retained significantly past their economic felling age. Operations may still be carried out within them and thinning is often necessary to maintain stability.

Minimum Intervention

Areas where no operations (such as thinning) will take place other than to protect public safety or possibly to control invasive exotic species.

Mixed Woodland

Woodland made up of broadleaved and coniferous trees.

National vegetation classification (NVC)

A classification scheme that allows an area of vegetation to be assigned to the standardised type that best matches the combination of plant species that it contains. All woodlands in the UK can be described as being one of 18 main woodland types (W1 - W18), which principally reflect soil and climatic conditions. For example, Upland Oakwoods are type W11, and normally occur on well drained infertile soils in the cooler and wetter north and west of Britain. Each main type can be subdivided into numerous subtypes. Most real woods contain more than one type or sub-type and inevitably some woods are intermediate in character and can't be properly described by any sub type.

Native Species

Species that arrived in Britain without human assistance.

Natural Regeneration

Naturally grown trees from seeds falling from mature trees. Also regeneration from coppicing and suckering.

Origin & Provenance

The provenance of a tree or seed is the place where seed was collected to grow the tree or plant. The origin is the geographical location within the natural range of a species from where seeds/tree originally derives. Thus an acorn collected from a Turkey oak in Edinburgh would have an Edinburgh provenance and a southern European origin.

Re-Stocking

Re-planting an area of woodland, after it has been felled.

Shrub Layer

Formed by woody plants 1-10m tall.

Silviculture

The growing and care of trees in woodlands.

Stand

Trees of one type or species, grouped together within a woodland.

Sub-Compartment

Temporary management division of a compartment, which may change between management plan periods.

Thinning

The felling of a proportion of individual trees within a given area. The remaining trees grow to fill in the space created.

Tubex or Grow or Tuley Tubes

Tubes placed over newly planted trees or natural regeneration that promote growth and provide protection from animals such as rabbits and deer.

Weeding

The control of vegetation immediately around newly planted trees or natural regeneration to promote tree growth until they become established.

Windblow/Windthrow

Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.

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