



# Nidd Gorge

## Management Plan 2017-2022

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## THE WOODLAND TRUST

### INTRODUCTION

The Trust's corporate aims and management approach guide the management of all the Trust's properties, and are described on Page 4. These determine basic management policies and methods, which apply to all sites unless specifically stated otherwise. Such policies include free public access; keeping local people informed of major proposed work; the retention of old trees and dead wood; and a desire for management to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Trust also has available Policy Statements covering a variety of woodland management issues.

The Trust's management plans are based on the identification of Key Features for the site and setting objectives for their management. A monitoring programme (not included in this plan) ensures that these objectives are met and any necessary management works are carried out.

Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

### PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATING

The information presented in this Management plan is held in a database which is continuously being amended and updated on our website. Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations. Please either consult The Woodland Trust website [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk) or contact the Woodland Trust ([wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk)) to confirm details of the current management programme.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and a summary of monitoring results can be obtained on request.

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## WOODLAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving woodland biodiversity and increasing peoples' understanding and enjoyment of woodland. Our strategic aims are to:

- Protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- Work with others to create more native woodlands and places rich in trees
- Inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk). Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) through independent audit. In addition to the guidelines below we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time.

We recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should also reflect their local landscape and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives. Guidelines like these provide a necessary overarching framework to guide the management of our sites but such management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our Site Manager's intimate knowledge of each site.

The following guidelines help to direct our woodland management:

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland using both natural regeneration and tree planting, but largely the latter, 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.
4. The long term vision for our non-native plantations on 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 heritage and cultural value of sites is taken into account in our management and, in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Woods can offer the potential to generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We will therefore consider the potential 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 allow our woods to be used to support 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. In particular we will develop and maintain a network of long-term monitoring sites across the estate.
- 10 Any activities we undertake will conform to sustainable forest management principles, be appropriate for the site and will be balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

## SUMMARY

This public management plan briefly describes the site, specifically mentions information on public access, sets out the long term policy and lists the Key Features which drive management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site - their significance is outlined together with their long (50 year+) and short (5 year) term objectives. The short term objectives are complemented by a detailed Work Programme for the period of this management plan. Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. A short glossary of technical terms is at the end. The Key Features and general woodland condition of this site are subject to a formal monitoring programme which is maintained in a central database. A summary of monitoring results is available on request.

## 1.0 SITE DETAILS

<b>Site name:</b>	Nidd Gorge
<b>Location:</b>	Bilton Banks, Harrogate
<b>Grid reference:</b>	SE328579, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 104
<b>Area:</b>	45.98 hectares (113.62 acres)
<b>Designations:</b>	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Great Landscape Value, Site of Special Scientific Interest

## 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Summary Description

Nidd Gorge woodland clings to a dramatic steep-sided valley. Its patchwork of habitats supports a wealth of wildlife and flora, and you'll find relics of an intriguing history dating back to the Iron Age.

### 2.2 Extended Description

The Woodland Trust acquired the site on the 15th May 1995 with considerable support from local groups such as The Ramblers Association, Yorkshire Naturalists, Town and Parish Councils local schools with particular support from the Bilton Conservation Group. The local fund-raising achieved over £60,000 towards the purchase price of £113,500 with £2000 being received from Harrogate Borough Council and £50,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

A 1.5 hectare extension to the north bank woodland (western boundary) was acquired by the Trust on the 9th April 2002 from Harrogate Borough Council.

The location was compartment 4d and parts of 2a and 3a.

The woodland is located approximately 1 mile to the west of Knaresborough, in the steep sided well-wooded valley called 'Nidd Gorge'. The River Nidd runs east west through the bottom of the gorge,

dividing the Woodland Trust woodland into two almost equal parts of 24.8ha and 20.5ha.

The Nidd Gorge area, including the valley woodlands and the surrounding agricultural land are exceptionally popular with walkers, fishermen and local residents. There is a small car park at the Ripley Road entrance on the northern edge of the woodland. A forest road from the car park meanders down through the northern bank to the river with footpaths connecting to it at various points. A substantial timber pedestrian bridge crosses the river and forms an important link to the footpath network on the southern bank. The bridge is owned and maintained by Harrogate Borough Council.

The wood is within the Nidd Gorge Project area, which was set up by Harrogate Borough Council and the Countryside Commission to conserve and manage the Nidd Gorge for both its ecological and recreational value. The funding from the Countryside Commission has ceased but a steering group still continues working as a forum to discuss proposals for any work within the project area, which includes the Woodland Trust's woodlands of Nidd Gorge and the adjacent, Bilton Beck and Rudding Bottoms. The Bilton Conservation Group is an active member of the steering group.

The gorge has arisen because the River Nidd was diverted from its old course by glacial action some 15,000 years ago. The action of the river since then has cut the gorge up to 40 metres deep. The depth and steep sided nature of the Gorge makes it a very imposing landscape feature. Along almost all of its length woodland covers both the northern and southern banks. This includes both private and the Woodland Trust's land holdings. Due to the steep sided nature of the valley, impressive views can be obtained from the upper slopes.

As the river cut the Gorge it exposed the Middle Permian Marl, the magnesium limestone and carboniferous rocks. The carboniferous are the oldest rocks and are exposed in the lower portions of the gorge and consist of sandstone, gritstone, shale and thin seams of coal. The Permian rocks are present at Oak Bank, these being the lower magnesium limestone and a red mudstone, middle Permian marl. As a result of the diverse geology and topography a wide variety of soil types are present. This variation of soil types from acidic to alkaline has greatly influenced some of the ground flora within the woodland.

The wood has a rich bryophyte flora including a number of uncommon examples. These are dependent on a continuous tree cover and are susceptible to trampling. Other flora varies with the underlying rock (see geology). Bramble and bracken are common where there is plenty of light. Bluebells, celandine, wood sorrel and wood anemones are common in the oak woodland areas. Foxgloves can be seen throughout the summer months. Where springs form marshy areas, marsh marigolds and pink purslane with meadowsweet and brooklime dominate with occasional moschatel. Along the riverside Himalayan balsam and Monkey flower are starting to invade. The flora on the north bank is similar where sufficient light has been able to penetrate the canopy. Unfortunately, some of the site is coniferous plantation, which was not thinned until 2000. The heavy shading has resulted in the loss of much of the ground cover. Hopefully following the thinning work some of the ground flora may re-establish.

Ninety-one species of fungi have been identified in the gorge including puffballs, cup fungi, jelly and bracket fungi.

Butterflies identified within the wood include common blue, peacock, wall brown as well as elephant

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hawk moths.

The woodlands contain a rich bird life including, woodcock, goldcrest, coal tits, great tits and blue tits. On the river are grey wagtails, dippers, kingfishers, redpolls and siskins can be seen. Sparrow hawk can be seen hunting in the open areas and goshawks are also present in the gorge.

Roe deer make good use of the woodland as do wood mice, bank voles, stoats, weasels, badgers and fox. Sadly otter are no longer present in this part of the gorge.

The river contains a wide variety of fish species which was surveyed by the Environment Agency in 1996. Species included trout, grayling, dace, grayling, chub, gudgeon and barbell. The previous owner retained fishing rights and a private club fishes the river within the wood.

At Gates Hill, within the Scotton Banks section of the woodland on the northern bank, a defensive earthwork has been constructed of a type not uncommon in the Iron Age. It is of county level importance and is not scheduled as an ancient monument. Local legend tells that Colonel Fairfax mounted cannon within the defences for the siege of Knaresborough during the Civil War. The site of the earthworks is now overgrown with trees and some land slippage has affected parts of the earthworks.

Near the riverside 'Jack Carters Cave' is shown on the ordnance survey maps, but is not evident on the ground. It is thought that he may have been a Civil War soldier who hid in the cave.

There are records of coal deposits being worked from 1744 to the 1820's in the Coalpits Wood on the southern side of the river. Here 'Bellpits' can be seen as small depressions where the coal has been dug. Limekilns such as the one near Oak Bank show that lime burning was probably a small-scale operation. The kiln has a mouth of about 2.5 metres and a depth of 5 metres and produced quicklime for agricultural use.

During the 1920's some of the old oak woods on the southern bank of the Nidd were felled. Much of the remainder was cleared during World War Two by prisoners of war. Now much of the southern bank consists predominantly coppice re-growth of broadleaves with natural regeneration of sycamore. It still has a semi natural feel to it and much of the ancient flora remains intact.

The northern bank has a mixture of woodland types including pure stands of conifers, sitka spruce and Corsican pine together with mixed broadleaves and pure broadleaf woodland. The plantations are predominantly even aged planted in about 1967. Some older trees are present, no doubt dating from about the wartime clearances. Most of the coniferous and mixed woodland had received little if any management work until extensive line and selective thinning was undertaken on approximately 8ha of the northern bank in 2000. The area has received additional thinning operations since then and future operations will continued at approximately 5 to 10 year interval until the percentage of conifers is reduced to around 10%.

## 3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

### 3.1 Getting there

By bus: There are buses from Knaresborough. The closest stop to the wood is at Scotton.

By train: The nearest train station is Knaresborough (1.5 miles).

For more information on public transport, contact Traveline on 0871 200 2233 or visit [traveline.org.uk](http://traveline.org.uk).

By car: From Knaresborough High Street, take the B6165 towards Ripley. After around 2.4 km (1.5 miles), there is a free car park with space for around 10 cars on the left, just before Scotton Drive.

(November 2016)

### 3.2 Access / Walks

There is an information board near the main entrance showing the woodland's extensive footpath network. From the car park, a pedestrian gate leads to a well-surfaced forest track with some gentle inclines. The track runs through the wood for around 1.1km (0.6 miles) to the river Nidd and connects with other paths, which link with a wider network leading to Harrogate, Knaresborough and the surrounding area. The Nidd Gorge site is steep in places, paths may include steps and board walks, and it can be slippery in wet weather.

There is a pedestrian bridge across the river just off the forest track, about 300m (330yds) from the car park. For Woodland Trust's Bilton Beck and Rudding Bottoms woodland, follow the riverside path to the west (upstream) for around 1.5km (one mile) from the bridge.



## 4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

## Northern Bank

The primary aim during the next 50-year period will be to revert the mixed compartments back to predominantly high forest of broadleaf species. Some individual conifers will be retained to reflect the management history of the site and provide age and species diversity. These trees will be left to decline naturally and only felled where safety requires such action. Within the pure conifer stands it is hoped that the thinning work undertaken in 2000 and 2010 together with all future operations will encourage natural regeneration of native broadleaved species. Small clearings may be made to further encourage regeneration. Work proposed over the next 50 years will therefore contain a continuation of thinning work. The natural regeneration will be monitored to ensure that it will be successful in ensuring the continuity of the woodland. Management of the regeneration may be needed to favour such species as oak and ash over sycamore and any spruce or other conifer regeneration controlled. If the regeneration is unsuccessful then new planting may be considered.

The sites unusual geology has created an interesting ground flora which will be maintained and enhance where ever possible through appropriate management, such as thinning and clearance work. Care will also be taken to safeguard the fauna on the site.

Public recreation within the woodland is an integral part of the management of the area. Informal public access will be maintained, and improved along the public and permissive footpaths. Viewpoints and seating may be created at specific points. Information on the site will be provided at the main car park on Ripley Road.

The north bank contains the earthworks of a hill fort, which possibly dates back to the Iron Age. This feature will be preserved and care taken during any silvicultural work. Information about the site is provided on the information board in the car park.

## Southern Bank

The southern bank is semi natural ancient woodland including species such as oak, ash, beech, birch, elm, hazel, cherry and sycamore. The sites unusual geology has created an interesting ground flora which will be maintained and enhance where ever possible through appropriate management.

The main compartment 1a (24.5 ha) is unfortunately dominated by mature sycamore but other hardwood species are present. This compartment will therefore be managed with minimum intervention.

Informal public access along the public and permissive footpaths will be maintained through path clearance and tree safety work. Steps and boardwalks will be maintained and improved where necessary. The work will be in conjunction with the Council as highway authority. Viewpoints and seating may be created at specific points.

The southern bank contains several sites of historic interest including old coal pits and a limekiln. These features would be preserved in any silvicultural work and included in any interpretation of the site such as leaflets or notice boards.

## 5.0 KEY FEATURES

The Key Features of the site are identified and described below. They encapsulate what is important about the site. The short and long-term objectives are stated and any management necessary to maintain and improve the Key Feature.

### 5.1 Archaeological Feature

#### Description

On the northern side of the river within Scotton Banks is Gates Hill, the earthworks of a hill fort. It is considered that the site is Iron Age but having occupation in more recent times. Local legend tells that Colonel Fairfax mounted cannon within the defences for the siege of Knaresborough during the Civil War.

The hill fort area, including the various ditches and embankments occupies an area of approximately 0.3ha. Unfortunately much of the hill fort area was lost when a hospital was constructed on the adjacent land (the site is now housing).

#### Significance

The feature represents a large archeological earthworks of significant local interest and importance.

#### Opportunities & Constraints

Unfortunately limited historical records appear to exist about the earthworks which are not a scheduled ancient monument. Further research is required on the sites history and an assessment of what, if any, is the appropriate type of management for the site. Selective tree removal may be required to reduce root damage and maintain or increase ground flora to assist with reducing soil erosion.

Following further investigation some work may be required for the site which might also include providing some public interpretation, either on or off the site.

#### Factors Causing Change

Landslip by natural causes, Increase in size of trees on site causing root damage to earthworks., Windblowing of trees., Damage to site by people with metal detectors digging for historical objects.

#### Long term Objective (50 years+)

To ensure the protection of the site by the gradual removal of trees and ensuring care during any harvesting operations.

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

An initial survey of the site has been undertaken. Further investigate would improve the knowledge of the sites historical significance. If the opportunity arose for further work to be undertaken this should be supported.

The gradual removal of a small number of pine trees (10%) from the site is proposed during the period 2013 to 2018 as part of the general restoration work within the gorge. This will also reduce the potential for damage to the earthworks.

## 5.2 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

### Description

The current designation from NCC Inventory of Ancient Woodland (1987) for the southern bank (24.8 ha) is semi natural ancient woodland. The northern bank extending to 20.5 ha is an ancient woodland site. The southern bank which consist of mixed broadleaves with hazel and holly under story in parts is to be managed as minimum intervention high forest. The northern bank, which has been planted with conifers on a large area of the site is to undergo silvicultural thinning work to reduce the conifer element and encourage broadleaves.

### Significance

The site contains a large area of planted ancient woodland and the Trust has the opportunity to restore the wood back to a predominately broadleaf wood. The site is very popular with local people and visitors and the work the Trust is doing does help promote the organisation and provide a local example of restoration work.

### Opportunities & Constraints

#### Constraints

- 1) Whilst the site contains an extensive conifer plantation it has little potential economically viable for timber production.
- 2) Fluctuations in timber prices could affect timing of timber operations.
- 3) Sloping ground and heavy clay soils making extraction difficult in wet weather.

#### Opportunities

- 1) The restoration work undertaken in 2000 has resulted in significant improvement in the ground flora and natural regeneration of hardwood species. It is considered that thinning work will result in further improvements.

### Factors Causing Change

Invasive Sycamore, Squirrel Damage, Deer Damage, Wind Damage to recently(2010) thinned area., Natural regeneration of groundflora and scrub understorey

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

#### Northern bank.

Reversion to predominately broadleaved woodland by thinning to over the next 50 years. Create small coupes suitable for natural regeneration of oak, ash and other broadleaved species and to encourage the development of ground flora and shrub under story in parts.

Increase in both standing and fallen deadwood.

#### Southern bank

Retention as minimum intervention woodland. Monitoring to be undertaken of natural regeneration and of species distribution.

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

The Woodland Condition and PAWS assessments planned for 2018 will guide the management, and will be entered into the short term objectives and the harvesting plan on the back of the recommendations produced

### 5.3 Planted Ancient Woodland Site

#### Description

The area of planted ancient woodland (PAWS) within Nidd Gorge extends to 8.75ha. Most of the trees were planted in the 1960's. Conifer species including Corsican pine, Hybrid larch and Sitka spruce.

#### Significance

Ancient woodland is the UK's richest wildlife habitat and the conversion of such wood to coniferous plantations has threatened the survival of such important habitat. The gradual removal of conifers is key objective in the restoration of such sites and Nidd Gorge occupies a significant area of threatened ancient woodland.

#### Opportunities & Constraints

The major opportunity is the restorations of the coniferous areas of the wood back to a predominantly broadleaf trees. Hopefully this will aid the recovery of the ground flora back that which is consistent of ancient woodland.

The constraints is that the restoration work can only be achieved over a period of time by gradual thinning the conifers to allow the re-establishment of the ground flora. The broadleaf trees to be introduced via natural regeneration and new planting.

#### Factors Causing Change

The potential factors which could cause change to the planned operations would include, frequent wind damage/ wind blow, disease such as Red Band Needle Blight, and Phytophthora, Fire, natural regeneration of conifer seedlings, excessive regrowth with bramble, natural regeneration of Himalayan Balsam. The wood has extensive areas of Himalayan balsam which will affect the establishment of ground flora. The balsam is being controlled but given the area this may be some time before it is rectified. Red Band Needle Blight is also present with some thinning to the crowns of the Corsican pines, but not too extensive in 2012.

#### Long term Objective (50 years+)

The long term vision to create a high forest of predominantly broadleaf species and a mixed age class distribution. The conifer element will be reduced through gradually thinning operations until it reaches less than 10% of the canopy.

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

By 2014 thinning work will be completed in all coniferous compartments with satisfactory light levels achieved so that all of the stands will be threatened rather than in a critical condition. The Woodland Condition and PAWS assessments planned for 2018 will then guide the management, and will be entered into the short term objectives and the harvesting plan on the back of the recommendations produced

## 5.4 Connecting People with woods & trees

### Description

This site is part of the Welcoming Sites Programme, which aims to improve the visitor experience to this site. The Welcoming Site Programme will lead to a series of lasting upgrades that will improve the visitor experience and will likely increase the number and range of visitors to the wood. An attractive and serviceable network of tracks and paths will further encourage the appreciation of the woodland both on the site and in the locality. The site will be managed to meet the required high standards of the Welcoming Site Programme and will provide a clear welcome: well-maintained car park, entrances, furniture, signs and other infrastructure as well as sustainable path and track surfaces across the variable ground conditions. Access will better facilitate use by a wider range of visitors. An engagement plan will set out a developed programme of engagement activities and events further enhancing public visits to the site. The site will be a truly valued resource in the local community and well respected.

### 'Its position in the landscape'

The woodland is located approximately 1 mile to the west of Knaresborough, in the steep sided well wooded valley called 'Nidd Gorge'. The River Nidd runs east west through the bottom of the gorge, dividing the Woodland Trust woodland into two almost equal parts of 24.8ha and 20.5ha. The Nidd Gorge area, including the valley woodlands and the surrounding agricultural land are exceptionally popular with walkers, fishermen and local residents. There is a small car park at the Ripley Road entrance on the northern edge of the woodland. A forest road from the car park meanders down through the northern bank to the river with footpaths connecting to it at various points. A substantial timber pedestrian bridge crosses the river and forms an important link to the footpath network on the southern bank. The river sculpted the sheer gorge and dramatic landscape in the last ice age. It's a planted ancient woodland site with the conifers gradually being thinned out to allow natural regeneration of the native broadleaf trees and shrubs.

The Gorge nurtures a huge variety of species, there is plenty to see throughout the year. Ancient and coniferous woodland provide a patchwork of habitats appealing to more than 80 species of birds. The hammering of the spotted and green woodpeckers can be heard among the trees and at dusk and dawn the calls of tawny owls. Down on the riverbank you may catch a glimpse of a fishing heron as it surveys the waters or the dart of the bright blue kingfisher. Mammals are also in abundance, the shy roe deer lurk on the edge of the woodland and agile bats hunt for insects over the river on summer's evenings. Watch your step in the autumn as 91 species of fungi are found on the floor of the wood including puffballs, cup, jelly and bracket fungi. Wild garlic and bluebells are some of the first flowering plants in spring.

Tribes inhabited the site during the Bronze age and constructed protective earthworks to improve visibility of approaching threats. Flint artefacts from this period have been found at Gates Hill Camp. With the River Nidd Leading to Knaresborough Castle it isn't surprising that the surrounding woods were central to Civil War siege of the castle in 1643. while a warning beacon was lit here during the Napoleonic Wars. The woodland has served local people for generations, , the remains of bellpits hark back to a time when the site was used for coal excavation. Similarly a lime kiln provided vital materials, supporting the country's industrial boom.

During both world wars the site was used by the armed forces for assault practice, this was particularly important during World War 11 as preparation for the D-Day landings took place here. In more recent years Scotton Banks Isolation Hospital treated patients for the likes of scarlet fever and tuberculosis. The hospital stood for 1929 until it was demolished in 1991 and replaced by the housing you see today.

‘General description of the access’

The woodland is signposted from the B6165 between the Village of Nidd to the west and the market town of Knaresborough to the east, by large roadside welcome signs adjacent to the access to the large gravel surfaced car park, which is suitable for approximately 15 cars. From this main access point a network of approximately 10-15km of permissive and public footpaths criss-cross the woodland and the wider Woodland Trust ownership including Bilton Beck. Initial route-finding can be difficult and disorientating given the terrain, path surfaces and number of routes. The paths are mostly unsurfaced, and during wet weather do become wet and muddy quickly. Along the north bank, and forest road gives good surfaced access for 1.5km from the car park through to the bridge crossing and beyond. Boardwalks on the southern bank provide good walking across the wettest sections of path, but underfoot conditions in places can still be very difficult. Within the path network are a multitude of viewpoints, and vistas, through woodland but often incorporating the River Nidd as the focus. Occasional sculptures are dotted around, part of previous accessibility and engagement projects. There is no formal access provision made for bikes or horse access.

The paths are very well used by locals and by visitors who can expect to enjoy magnificent woodland walks through varied woodland, with the previously mentioned features being popular waymarks for those in the know. The paths link with wider long distance trails in the vicinity, including the Harrogate Ringway to the south and the Sustrans cycleway to the west. The Woodland Trust holding forms the main accessible part of the wider Nidd Gorge woodlands which extend from Bilton in the west through to Knaresborough in the east. A private fishing club operates on the river which has vehicle access down to the riverside turning circle

‘The visitor profile’

There are no current visitor numbers available, but the woodland and car park are generally busy throughout the day, and hugely popular at weekends and during holidays, catering for visitors from considerable distances as well as locals, with over 8,000 households within the immediate postcode, and with the population of the Harrogate district estimated to be 100,000 people within 5 miles.

‘Events and activities’

There are currently no formal people engagement events planned for Nidd Gorge, but Increased visitor engagement is planned as part of the short term objectives for the woodland.

‘Nearby Woodland Trust sites’

There are a significant number of Woodland Trust sites within the immediate vicinity, with Skipton Castle Woods a key destination site for visitors, along with Hackfall - a woodland of national importance.

‘Volunteering’

There is currently a long established local group - the Bilton Conservation Volunteers, who undertake a wide range of activity within the woodland who do some excellent work which is primarily on the Harrogate/ Bilton side of the wood. They have been involved in boardwalk construction, tree planting on adjacent land, archaeological digs and general wildlife walks and talks.

‘specific furniture/ access point description’

Currently the signage provision on site is limited to the standard sized name boards at each of the 7

entrances, along with the main large welcome sign at the roadside and a large covered information board by the car park access into the woodland. On Gates Hill, there is also an interpretation panel relating to the bronze age, Napoleonic and later civil war encampments. There are 16 access points into the woodland. The entire furniture, signage and access point will all be significantly revised during a significant expansion of the woodland management and access provision planned for 2018

### **Significance**

Increasing enjoyment of woodland is one of the Woodland Trust's key outcomes. Improving parking and trails and engagement opportunities is particularly important given the sites proximity to the significant populations of Knaresborough and Harrogate. Promoting access to other nearby local attractions and links with local businesses for events and facilities for visitors for visitors is also a key part of the Nidd Gorge development. This will help improve enjoyment of the site for existing users and encourage a more diverse range of new visitors to the site.

### **Opportunities & Constraints**



Nidd Gorge is a beautiful historic woodland with lots of stories to reveal, it's close to significant centres of population. It is already well used by a variety of user groups and has a well defined network of paths

There is a significant expansion of the woodland management and access provision planned for 2018 - 2020. A large program of work is also planned to improve the access around the wider site with a surfaced path, upgrade of the car park and revamp of the entire site signage, way marking and existing entrances. The short term upgrades in infrastructure, trails and on site interpretation will support the needs of the identified key visitor groups, as well as providing development opportunities for events, volunteering and community engagement.

This infrastructure work is just part of a wider programme of woodland management on the site as a whole as harvesting work continues in this established woodland over the next plan period. This work will create a greater diversity of habitats, by creating a mosaic of age structures, restoring planted ancient woodland, and allow species diversity through regeneration, which in turn will give the woodland more resilience for the future

There is the opportunity for a sustainable events and schools programme to be established, including demonstrations and workshops, as well as opportunities for innovation and rural businesses to utilise the woods to produce marketable products that come from the Woodland Trusts sustainable woodland management.

Education and involvement of the community are a key priority for this site. There are 54 Schools registered for the various Woodland Trust Schools schemes (Green Tree Schools, DEFRA and People Postcode Lottery programmes) within 10km of the site. There is great potential for developing an onsite education area and resources. Given the size of the site and range of habitats and areas there is also potential to develop areas dedicated to forest Schools without having any major impact on the site or other users.

Community groups and Volunteers: The site offers great potential for engagement with volunteers and community woodland groups, especially given the age range and areas of woodland available as well as the development of the extension area. There are opportunities for site wardens, we have people who do help out on site on an ad hoc basis. There is the possibility of setting up a North Yorkshire Conservation group that could do practical tasks across a number of our key sites, Nidd Gorge being one of them. We can also explore the options for a volunteer welcome hub on site to meet and greet people at the car park or within the woodland.

As well as the very well established tourist market within Harrogate and Knaresborough, there are a host of nearby visitor attractions including Ripley Castle, Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, Plumpton Rocks, Brimham Rocks, Stockeld Park and the Yorkshire Water sites along the Washburn Valley. There is significant scope to work in association with these existing tourist attractions to promote the work of the Trust and attract more visitors through the Nidd Gorge Woodlands.

## Factors Causing Change

Increased numbers of visitors will require significantly improved infrastructure on the site and greater engagement with visitors, volunteers, businesses and community engagement. It will also require a greater level of annual maintenance, with a periodic (10 year) refurbishment of the entire welcome facilities as well as a higher expectation of the quality of the infrastructure and interpretation provided.

There is the potential major impact of the Harrogate ring road development. One of the suggested routes passes adjacent to Nidd Gorge. It is only one of the suggested options at this stage but if it went ahead could have a significant impact especially with any associated infill development. River flooding could worsen in future years which impacts on the woodland with the potential to do more damage to paths and riverbank.

The Woodland is also very popular with dog walkers and dog walking companies if this was to increase significantly it could have a detrimental effect on the visitor experience.

Ash dieback is becoming more evident and will probably have a significant impact on the tree species composition

The Bilton Conservation Volunteers have a constant challenge to attract new members to support the vital work they do in the woodland. If they were to become less effective it would have an impact on our ability at present to maintain some of the footpath network.

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

The woodland will provide an extensive area of quiet informal recreation to a wide range of users both from the local community and from further afield. The use of the site by tourists will be promoted through positive relationships with neighbouring tourist destination sites, with good signage and interpretation.

Entrances and signage will have a welcoming appearance and there will be a network of well-maintained paths providing a range of circular routes suitable for walkers with viewpoints over a range of varied habitat types, integrated with active woodland management and wherever possible linking to the surrounding path network. Interpretation and waymarking that is fully integrated with, or compliments existing routes and tourist opportunities will provide visitors with information on routes and points of interest.

The use of the site for education will have increased, with a sustainable events and schools programme established, including demonstrations and workshops, as well as opportunities for innovation and rural businesses to utilise the woods to produce marketable products that come from the Woodland Trusts sustainable woodland management. The site will be seen as a flagship woodland trust site also benefiting the local community and local businesses.

The restoration work within the areas planted with conifer species would be almost complete and the majority of the conifers have been removed and regenerating broadleaf species are thriving. A trail for children will be situated in the woodland and updated and maintained on a suitably regular basis. Other temporary (art) structures and installations could move between different woods

At the entrance to the woodland or within the wood we have a regular presence with a wooden structure to promote membership and the wider work of the Woodland Trust this could act as a refreshment kiosk too. Volunteer rangers are on hand to answer visitors queries and lead regular guided walks around the site with donations and membership to the Woodland Trust a key ask for all those who visit. There is also the possibility to work more closely with the Bilton Conservation group

### **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 well-drained and free from encroaching vegetation by strimming, and that access features (e.g. bridges, steps, entrances, boundary features, 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).

The visitor welcome & experience will be further enhanced by the following infrastructure improvements by the end of the current plan period:

To overhaul the existing car park, redesigning the layout, surfacing, boundaries, access and height barriers and signage, to increase capacity and provide a welcoming entrance to the woodland, which will through an enhanced maintenance programme be kept at a high standard.

Significant improvement to the welcome signage, including refurbishment or replacement of the existing brown tourist information signs, roadside welcome signage, key signage and interpretation/ leaflet at the car park and at key locations through the woodland (eg viewpoints, restoration/ woodland management , historic locations ) Minor entrances will be formalised with a consistent access standard (eg kissing gate and named welcome and exit signs)

The network of paths will be reviewed, providing a variety of paths, rides and glades so that people can continue to enjoy free access on foot throughout the wood, with a clear maintenance plan for the site. A number of waymarked routes will be installed and potentially additional surfaced routes. Paths, rides and open spaces will be maintained on an annual basis up to three times a year to ensure that access for walkers is maintained at all times.

The work proposed to be undertaken consists of 2 major sets of steps, 3 kilometres of paths and repairs or removal of 50m of boardwalk.

Seating will be replaced and new seats added where possible. We will explore the possibility for a mobile facility to meet and greet visitors with refreshment area along with the opportunity for a longer promoted footpath route starting and finishing outside of the woodland.

New volunteer activity and volunteer roles will be developed and encouraged, along with the existing Bilton Conservation Group volunteers. Volunteers will be encouraged to attend events and taking part in activities with the regular volunteer group. There could be scope for a lead volunteer on site. This person and the group could work just at Nidd Gorge or could look at opportunities to have a work party that covers a number of sites in the Yorkshire area such as Hackfall, Nidd and Skipton for example.

Identified areas of the woodland will be used for education or informal play, with forest schools and other local user groups suited to the aims and objectives of the Woodland Trust will be encouraged wherever possible.

An events programme will be established, including demonstrations and workshops, as well as encouraging opportunities for innovation and rural businesses to utilise the woods to produce marketable products that come from the Woodland Trusts sustainable woodland management.

## 6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By
2017	AW - Visitor Access Infrastructure	4 x infra red counters and associated equipment for Nidd Gorge ref - 8723	20/10/17
2017	PE - Interpretation & Signage	Ref SO0115679 4 xA3 Correx signs dog code of Conduct, Holes in each corner please. Delivery to -  Mark Feather Woodland Trust 10 Grosvenor Place Beverley East Yorks HU17 8LY	20/10/17
2017	CS - General Consultancy	Construction Details , agreeing scope of construction works CDM regulations - as itemised in letter of the 23rd June 2017 to Alistair Nash. Cost £2,400  Production of tender package , inviting tenders and tender report £2,500  Total cost £4,900	31/10/17
2017	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Re-surfacing of 500m of footpath.  New field Gate and signage at southern entrance to the wood.  Contribution to new footbridge at Bilton Beck	31/10/17
2017	WC - Tree / Seed Supply	6 x Poplar Nigra - Clone 34 Male Plug 20-60cm ref 17309	23/11/17
2017	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone B	Removal of fallen ash tree across main path from housing estate down to main access forest road	30/11/17
2018	PE - Interpretation & Signage	New welcome signage at entrance to the Car Park and other main access points	28/02/18
2018	AW - Car Park Construction	Car park re-build, based on estimate of £42k	28/02/18

2018	AW - Car Park Construction	car park - specifications, detailed designs and additional planning fees and consultant costs	01/05/18
2018	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	29/05/18
2018	PE - Events - General	Spring Dawn chorus walk for the public	31/05/18
2018	PE - Interpretation & Signage	Waymarker posts x 30 from Landmark Timber	31/05/18
2018	PE - Interpretation & Signage	redesign and update Hill fort interpretation	30/06/18
2018	PE - Interpretation & Signage	Design and print of new general site leaflet	31/07/18
2018	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	31/07/18
2018	PE - Interpretation & Signage	Reprint and redesign of the Adventure Trail leaflet	31/08/18
2018	PE - Interpretation & Signage	New roofed information board by the car park to orientate visitors includes design work and printing	30/09/18
2018	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	WREN Funded footpath work - access work  Re-surfacing of 500m of footpath.  New field Gate and signage at southern entrance to the wood.	01/10/18
2018	PE - Events - General	Autumn Photography Workshop at Nidd Gorge for the public	31/10/18
2019	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	29/05/19
2019	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	31/07/19
2020	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	29/05/20
2020	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	31/07/20

2021	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	29/05/21
2021	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	31/07/21
2022	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	29/05/22
2022	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Cut vegetation surrounding car park, and along the footpaths as per attached plan to spec 2.1	31/07/22

## APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	24.58	Sycamore	1940	High forest	No/poor vehicular access to the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
<p>Current designation from the NCC Inventory of Ancient Woodland 1987 is semi natural ancient woodland. The riverside trees in this compartment are mainly alder but the predominantly tree is sycamore, accounting for approximately 40- 60%. Other species present include oak, wild cherry, birch, rowan, ash and beech. Bilton Banks contains several mature yew (100 years plus) but the majority of trees appear under 100 years of age. It is thought that extensive areas of the compartment were felled during the second World War, which perhaps accounts for the age structure of the wood with few over mature specimens. Under storey species include hazel, holly and bramble. Natural regeneration is mainly of sycamore. Elm is present in place with some sucker growth. Ground flora contains some large areas of garlic, bluebells and dogs mercury. Bracken is also extensive in places. A small area of new tree planting of was undertaken in Oak Bank in 1999 with donations from Taylors Tea. Tree species included oak, ash, birch and cherry. Many of the trees succeeded along with a small amount of natural regeneration. The compartment is to be managed as minimum intervention high forest. Minor work will be undertaken to keep the footpaths open and free of obstructions such as fallen trees.</p>							
2a	0.70	Corsican pine	1967	PAWS restoration	Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>A nearly pure stand of Corsican pine (P67) situated on a very steep embankment to the north of the main access road. The area was not thinned until 2000 when selective thinning was undertaken. The compartment also contains approximately 5% broadleaved species including oak, sycamore, ash and willow. These are mainly situated along the southern boundary of the compartment although isolated trees can be found within it.</p>							
2b	0.25	Corsican pine	1967	PAWS restoration		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland



<p>Small area of nearly pure Corsican pine (P67) situated on a steep slope between the forest road and River Nidd. Mixed broadleaved and larch (compartment 3B) forms the northern boundary with sitka spruce (compartment 5a) to the south and in a thin strip alongside the river on the western boundary. A small number (5%) of broadleaved species are present, mainly along the forest road boundary but occasional thin drawn birch are within the compartment. The compartment was first thinned in 2000.</p>							
2c	1.40	Corsican pine	1967	PAWS restoration		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
<p>Small area of pure Corsican pine (P67) situated on a steep slope between the forest road and the hill fort. Broadleaved woodland along the northern boundary with sitka spruce compartment to the south. The road forms the south western boundary which has a band of broadleaved species along the boundary including birch, thorn, oak and dog rose. Occasional thin drawn birch and sycamore are within the compartment. Compartment thinned for the first time in 2000.</p>							
2d	0.50	Corsican pine	1967	PAWS restoration	No/poor vehicular access to the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>Pure stand of Corsican pine (P67) situated on a land at the top of a steep embankment and adjacent to the houses on Appleby Avenue. The area has had several small thin to waste operations since 2000. Isolated broadleaved trees are within the compartment.</p>							
3a	1.80	Hybrid larch	1967	PAWS restoration	Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>The current designation from NCC inventory of ancient woodland (1987) is an ancient semi natural woodland site. The compartment consists of a mixed plantation of larch, ash, beech and sycamore (P1967). Limited under storey and the ground flora is limited in parts, probably due to the dense shading from beech.</p>							
3b	1.00	Hybrid larch	1967	PAWS restoration		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>The current designation from NCC inventory of ancient woodland (1987) is an ancient semi natural woodland site. The compartment consists of a mixed plantation of larch, ash and sycamore (P1967). The boundary to the forest track contains a broadleaved boundary with dense shrubs but the remaining area has limited under storey shrubs but the ground flora is more varied.</p>							

4a	4.60	Mixed broadleaves	1967	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access within the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>Predominantly broadleaved woodland of mainly sycamore and ash with occasional larch, western red cedar, Scots and Corsican pine. The trees appear to be about (P1967) as with the much of the northern bank woodland. Sycamore and ash are mainly multi-stemmed trees from coppice stools. Much of the compartment contains very steep slopes and rock outcrops making silvicultural work very difficult.</p>							
4b	2.40	Mixed native broadleaves	1967	High forest	No/poor vehicular access to the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>The compartment contains predominantly broadleaved trees, mainly sycamore and ash with occasional larch. Trees appear to be slightly older than compartment 4a and probably date from after war time clearances. Most trees have formed single stems. The northern part of the compartment contains some wet, fairly flat areas, but two thirds of the compartment has very steep slopes and small rock outcrops.</p>							
4c	4.50	Mixed broadleaves	1900	High forest		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>This large area contains mainly sycamore(60%) and ash (20%) with occasional oak (10%). Small number of elm, hazel and rowan accounting for 10% .. The percentage of sycamore diminishes alongside the river, where ash makes up about 60% of the canopy. The riverside boundary of the compartment is lined almost by entirely alder trees.</p>							
4d	0.78	Mixed native broadleaves	1940	High forest	Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>The compartment contains the site of a former quarry and borders housing to the north and the River Nidd on its southern edge. It consists of mainly mature sycamore - P1940, with limited understorey, some hazel, holly and thorn.</p>							
5a	3.10	Sitka spruce	1967	PAWS restoration		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)

Pure stand of sitka spruce (P67) situated mainly on a gentle sloping land but there is one steep embankment within the compartment. The spruce also continues as a narrow band of trees alongside the river to the north of the main block. The area was not thinned until 2000 when line and selective thinning undertaken. A few isolated tall drawn birches can be found within the compartment, along with an odd oak, but this area is in the main 95% spruce. The riverside boundary does contain a strip of mainly alder with occasional trees being other hardwood species such as sycamore, willow, ash and oak. At the eastern end of the compartment are a few Corsican pines. The spruce trees have exceptionally good form with tall straight stems and top heights of nearly 30m.

## GLOSSARY

### **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. Either by hand cutting or with carefully selected weed killers such as glyphosate.

## **Windblow/Windthrow**

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