



# Avon Valley Woods

## 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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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®) under licence FSC-C009406 and 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>	Avon Valley Woods
<b>Location:</b>	Woodleigh
<b>Grid reference:</b>	SX732490, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 202
<b>Area:</b>	139.42 hectares (344.51 acres)
<b>Designations:</b>	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Ancient Woodland Site, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

## 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Summary Description

As the Trust's first ever purchase, this cluster of diverse woodlands holds a very special place in our hearts. Ancient semi-natural woodland clings to the steep-sided valley of the River Avon, opening up into areas of newer planting and grassy clearings that offer stunning views over the rolling Devon countryside.

## 2.2 Extended Description

The Avon Valley Woods lie just north of the small hamlet of Woodleigh within the South Devon AONB (National Character Area 151: South Devon) in a landscape described as “inland undulating uplands” and “river valley slopes and coombes”. The area is characterised by a farmed plateau of often shallow well drained stony soils lying between the steep wooded river valleys of the Avon and Torr Brook.

The woods are a complex of Aveton, Bedlime, Titcombe, Woodleigh (Avon), Centry and Watkins Woods. Collectively these form 139 hectares of accessible woodland linked by a network of paths and tracks, ranging from ancient semi natural woodland alongside the river Avon, to coniferised areas of ancient woodland planted in the 1960s, and finally extensive areas of recent creation. The important conservation value of these sites is in part recognised by the County Wildlife Status of the ancient semi natural woodland areas.

The woods represent the earliest acquisitions made by Kenneth Watkins, founder of the Woodland Trust and are a living tribute to his vision. The very first wood owned by the Trust was Bedlime which was purchased on the 24th October 1972. At that time the wood had been used widely for shooting and there was a perceived pressure that woods within the valley would be felled and converted to conifer as part of the drive by the government policies and management fashions of the time. These fears provided the initial drive for acquisitions in the valley and the setting up of the Woodland Trust. In August 1973 Dartshill Copse (adjoining Bedlime, and now treated as part of Bedlime), Titcombe Wood and Woodleigh Wood (Avon) were purchased.

The valley of the River Avon is the main landscape feature of the site, the broadleaved and coniferised ancient woodland areas are confined to the banks and the steep valley slopes and the recently planted broadleaved woodland areas found on the level pastoral plateau above the valley.

The Victorian railway that ran through the valley from Loddiswell Station now forms the basis of a level walking route through the valley and links many of the woodlands together until emerging at Topsham Bridge. The site provides one of the largest areas of accessible woodland in the South Devon AONB. The main valley path can be gained from Topsham Bridge and the former Loddiswell Station however, parking is very limited. The valley path is often flooded and although generally level provides a challenging walk. The recently planted woodlands can be accessed from the public highway just north of Woodleigh Village and limited parking is provided at most entrances.

## 3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

### 3.1 Getting there

By bus: There is a limited service to Loddiswell village, around 2.4km (1.5 miles) away along minor country lanes with no pavements.

By train: The nearest station is at Totnes, 16km (10 miles) north of Watkins Wood.

For up-to-date information on public transport, visit [traveline.org.uk](http://traveline.org.uk) (phone 0871 200 22 33) or [travelinesw.com](http://travelinesw.com).

By car: From the A379 from Modbury or the A381 from Totnes, take the B3194 and then the turning to Loddiswell. Around 1.6km (one mile) along this road, take the turning to Woodleigh on the right, which leads past Loddiswell station. Alternatively, the B3196 runs into Loddiswell from the A38 to the north. From Loddiswell, follow signs for Woodleigh. The road below Loddiswell station is broad and there is parking for a limited number of vehicles.

(January 2017)

### 3.2 Access / Walks

There are a number of public footpaths on the site, including routes alongside the River Avon and through the wilder part of the woods. Access to each wood is mostly from surrounding country lanes via step-over stiles, kissing gates or hunting gates.

Aveton Wood in the north can be accessed from Coombe Lane above Topsham Bridge.. There is a network of forest tracks, some of which are up steep slopes. parking at Aveton is currently imforam on the forest track. It is possible to access Titcombe and Woodleigh Woods from Aveton, although the route is steep and rough and it's necessary to cross the river via an old railway bridge (outside Woodland Trust ownership).

Bedlime Wood to the north of the complex has very steep and undulating ground and no maintained paths. Coombe Lane runs alongside the wood for a short distance.

Woodleigh and Titcombe Woods are accessed along a narrow public footpath beside the disused Loddiswell Station in the south, or from Topsham Bridge in the north via a public footpath. This crosses private land before running the one-mile length of both Woodleigh and Titcombe Woods. Springs flowing over the path are crossed by boardwalks but there may be seasonal flooding in places. The path is also uneven and sometimes rocky, making walking challenging. An old railway (not in Woodland Trust ownership), currently used as a permissive path, runs throughout the valley and is often parallel to the public footpath.

Access to Watkins Wood and Centry Wood is directly from the lane running north from Woodleigh village. Entrances on the permissive and public bridleway routes have field and hunting gates, while the footpaths have kissing gates. There is currently formal car parking for 2 cars on the western side of the road, although many cars park on the road verges. There is a step-over stile access to Bartlands field to the north-east. Paths and rides crossing the site are uneven and steep in places.

There is one public bridleway on the site crossing the northern section of Watkins Wood. This route follows a sunken farm lane with an uneven, sometimes rocky surface. Other permissive bridleways exist around the boundaries but wet ground makes access difficult at times.

## 4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The majority of the Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (Bedlime, Titcombe and Woodleigh) will be left to allow natural process to dominate with the intention to create old growth stands of varied canopy structure in an equilibrium of decline and re-growth. However as there may be long term limitations to this approach including declining light levels through a lack of wind throw or other natural process, increasing percentages of non-natives such as beech and sycamore and the more extensive regeneration of holly. Holly and other invasive shrubs will be controlled as necessary.

Aveton Wood will be slowly reverted to broad leaf woodland following the Woodland Trust's 'Plantation on Ancient Woodland' restoration methods, focusing on thinning to maintain light levels by the slow removal of non-natives and securing the development and restoration of largely native woodland cover . Those areas that were clear felled due to Phytophthora ramorum and restocked in 2013 /14 will be managed as continuous cover woodland with little intervention in the foreseeable future, other than ride edge management.

Watkins Wood will be a broad leaf woodland with wide rides and large open grassy areas, with a diverse structure and flora. Grazing will be a major tool in managing much of the area at a low intensity. The woodland closest to Woodleigh village (parts of Watkins East and Centry Wood) will be managed as continuous cover woodland with some coppicing on ride edges and thinning as necessary, however the onset of ash die back may mean that thinning is not required.

The large hedgerows will be managed through hedge laying on along cycle.

The orchard in Centry Wood will be a large orchard with many local varieties, used by people as a free resource of fruit and for educational purposes.

The Avon Valley Woods will have an expanded range of people visiting the woodland, through the organisations 'Welcoming Sites' Programme, with greater promotion and access resources including appropriate levels of car parking. Community groups will be encouraged to use the area and actively take part in its management.

## 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 Ancient Woodland Site

#### Description

### Ancient Woodland - Bedlime (Compt 1a), Titcombe, Avon and Woodleigh Woods (Compt 2a)

These 4 woodlands run contiguously along the steep eastern side of the river Avon. They are semi-natural woodlands with a variety of NVC stand types due to varying between well drained to wetter soils, with many spring lines. The woodlands all differ slightly in composition and management history but are essentially western atlantic oak woodlands. The northern part of Titcombe Wood (Compt 2b) is a plantation on ancient woodland according to the ancient woodland inventory but there is no evidence of this on the ground. There are areas of overstood chestnut coppice and alders in the flatter water logged valley bottoms. Large beech trees can also be found along the river edge as well as sycamores. Regeneration is mainly shade tolerant beech and sycamore. Small areas of laurel and rhododendron have been cleared in the past, and holly is now becoming more of an issue in terms of dominating the understory, shading out ground flora and prohibiting natural regeneration opportunities, particularly in Woodleigh Wood (Compt 2a). Bracken and bramble also dominate in some areas. Ground flora is varied with some large areas of bluebells, patches of Great wood - rush and areas dominated by ferns such as Harts-tongue fern and Broad buckler fern. Spring lines have plants such as Opposite leaved golden saxifrage. Cumulatively the woods are in close proximity to similar sites within the valley system and form a large area of semi-natural cover.

### Planted Ancient Woodland - Aveton Wood (Compt 5)

Aveton sits at the north western edge of the Woodland Trust's Avon Valley complex and is separated from the rest of the complex by the river Avon. Historically it was a mixture of ancient woodland (compts 5a,b,c) open fields and an orchard (Compt 5d) and some secondary woodland to the south (Compt 5e). A small stream runs through the wood and joins the Avon at Topsham bridge to the south. Compartments 5a and d were replanted with Japanese larch and compartments 5b and c with Douglas Fir in 1964. In 2014 the larch was infected with phytophthora ramorum and hence the Trusts approach to PAWS restoration has had to be adapted and the larch clearfelled under a statutory plant health notice. As a result 6ha (Compt 5a & d) was restocked with native broadleaf trees to mimic the NVC W8 / W10 woodland community, with hazel shrubs planted in-between to try to gain canopy closure quickly so as to control the bracken and bramble. Wide edges were left unplanted alongside the tracks and rides to increase the habitat diversity. The areas of Douglas fir were thinned at the same time following the Trusts management approach to PAWS restoration. A small area in the valley bottom of the stream was clear felled, with the Douglas Fir being removed in 2003 and restocked (Compt 5a pt). There are also some areas which are dominated by mature sycamore. The ground flora is varied with the former open field areas dominated by bracken and bramble; whereas some of the PAWS areas have very good populations of bluebells.

### Significance

Corporate objective: Aim 2 - Protecting native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future.

The valley woods were also the first woodlands acquired by the Trust and contribute to the WT's objective of increasing Woodland biodiversity and no further losses of Ancient Woodland.

The woodlands are considered a significant feature of the South Devon AONB and the County Wildlife Site designation confirms the importance of the woodlands BAP status. The woodlands provide the largest area of accessible semi-natural woodland in the AONB.

### Opportunities & Constraints

#### Opportunities

To influence management of ASNW to the south of Bedline Wood to enable better continuity of management along this stretch of the Avon valley, Coldharbour Wood to the east of Watkins wood and Silver Ridge to the west of Woodleigh Wood to promote PAWS restoration management in line with Woodland Trust's restoration policy.

#### Constraints

There is no easy access to Bedlime (Compt 1a), Titcombe, Avon and Woodleigh Woods (Compt 2a) for woodland management.

### Factors Causing Change

The closed mature canopy structure favours shade tolerant species and the regeneration of species such as beech/sycamore and holly and a resultant loss of ground flora is a growing risk, due to increasingly dense stands, however windblow, particularly in Titcombe and Woodleigh woods, is opening up the canopy allowing more light in. Holly is becoming a major issue shading out the ground, so limiting natural regeneration.

Flooding in the river valley may lead to an increase in Himalayan balsam.

Tree diseases could further impact on the woods; however these compartments have little ash in them so ash die back will not be a major factor. Sweet Chestnut Blight may affect all the compartments if it spreads further into Devon.

Deer and squirrel damage are not currently major factors could be so in the future.

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

The woodland will have a diverse and varied age structure of broadleaved cover over the entire group of woodlands, managed through limited intervention mainly controlling holly and eradicating rhododendron and laurel where they still exist. The remaining PAWS areas of Aveton will be managed through a continuous cover forestry approach implementing selective thinning to gradually open up the canopy and promote broadleaved natural regeneration; the broadleaved plantation in the former larch areas will develop into mature broadleaf woodland with open shrubby rides edges.

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

1. None native rhododendron and laurel, and invasive holly will be controlled in compts 1a and 2b to stop spread and remove the long term threat. Holly will be reduced to 5% cover within the life time of this plan.
2. Some beat up of the broadleaf plantations (Compts 5a & d) in Aveton may be required so ensure that the new woodland establishes properly.
3. The ride edges in Aveton will be managed to remain as open habitat.
4. Himalayan balsam will be controlled as necessary through hand pulling.

## 5.2 Mixed Habitat Mosaic

### Description

Watkins and Centry Wood (Compts 3 and 4) combine to make up an area totalling 79.77ha. When acquired the site was 5 large arable fields with the Woodleigh to Hendon road running through the middle. The 3 fields to the west (Compt 3a and b) are separated by large Devon banks and hedgerows and link to the Woodleigh Wood (Compt 2a). On the eastern side (Compts 4a,b,c) the land falls steeply to the Torr Brook. Native woodland was planted in both areas between 2000 and 2004 based on NVC W8 Ash Maple and NVC W10 Oak bramble types found in adjacent mature semi natural woodland. Much of the woodland has developed well and has created an interesting habitat with an excellent mixture of space, structure and ground flora, however as it matures further this will be lost. Ash dieback has been found in the autumn of 2016 which may considerably alter the structure and composition of the woodland. Wide rides and some areas of open space were left partly due to the location of overhead electricity cables, but also due to the landscape assessment recommendations. Two of these areas have been fenced and are grazed by a local grazier (Compts 3b and 4c). The lower slopes of the western area (Compt 3a) were deliberately left for natural tree colonisation and are developing into a valuable scrub, grass mosaic. The ground flora is varied with some areas, such as those in Watkins west (Compt 3a) and the area to the northeast at Bottom Field Plantation (Compt 4b) having plants such as bird's foot trefoil, barren strawberry, hawkbits and the introduced flower 'fox and cubs'. There are some good populations of common spotted orchids. The distribution of the wildflowers follows the phosphate levels of each of the areas, Watkins east to the south of the bridleway having the highest levels and Bottom Field Planation the lowest. Open areas are generally being mown the arisings left in situ. Ragwort is still a significant problem.

Centry Wood (Compt 4a) is located closest to the village of Woodleigh and was established in 2000 as part of the "Woods On Your Doorstep" project. Much of it is open ground and was designed as such so that the village could run events there; however this has not happened for some years. A hedgerow was planted to demarcate the boundary between Watkins and Centry Woods. A small orchard (Compt 4d) was planted which has struggled to grow to any size, this is the subject of another key feature.

### Significance

Corporate objective: Aim 1 - To enable the creation of more native woods and places rich in trees.

Watkins connects and buffers a number of other woodlands, the majority of which are ancient. The woods design fits within the AONB landscape well with much of the woodland on the valley sides with open 'tops'. Combined with the other woodland blocks it makes for one of the largest areas of woodland habitat in south Devon.

Watkins wood is also named after the founder of the Woodland Trust

### Opportunities & Constraints

Current management does not help to control ragwort or encourage further diversification of the flora. Some of the natural colonisation areas are now too difficult to mow so losing their interest. The most effective way of maintaining the current ecological interest would be to manage large areas of Watkins as wood pasture, creating a dynamic habitat. All of the western area of Watkins (Compt 3a) is suitable as is the area to the north of the bridleway (Compt 4b). This would also provide opportunities to monitor the development of woodland habitat creation and long term management.

The constraining issues are whether a grazier with enough of the right livestock can be found, the costs of installing fencing and water, and the potential conflict between animals and dog walkers.

### Factors Causing Change

Ash die back may have a considerable effect on the woodland and likely lead to significant loss of canopy - grazing may have to be reviewed if trees are unable to regenerate naturally to replace natural mortality.

The maturing of the woodland will mean that it will lose its 'edge' structure along many of the paths. Deer and squirrel damage, while not an issue at the moment could become so within the life time of this plan, deer limiting natural regeneration and squirrels affecting more mature trees.

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

Much of Watkins will be lightly grazed by cattle creating a diverse wood pasture like habitat. Some areas will have mature open woodland feel to them, while others will be more dense and scrubby. Large open areas will have some scrub in them and a diverse range of wildflowers. The remaining woodland will be managed as continuous cover, the ride edges being coppiced on a 15 year cycle to maintain the diversity of the edges and to keep the rides themselves light and open. Some of the larger open areas will be managed as hay meadows, which will develop into floristically rich grasslands.

The hedgerows will be under a long term cycle of hedge laying to maintain the structure and historical continuity.

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

1. Complete the removal of all tree guards from Watkins East (Compt 4a) to ensure compliance with UKWAS requirements.
2. Control ragwort through a combination of spot spraying basal rosettes and hand pulling to stop its spread and slowly reduce coverage.
3. Begin the ride side coppicing cycle in Watkins East (Compt 4a) to create and maintain woodland edge habitat supporting a wide range of associated species notably butterflies and birds.
4. Take hay cuts and aftermath graze the 2 grassland areas at the top of the wood (Compts 3b and 4d), to continue to reduce nutrient levels and promote an increasing variety/intensity of grassland flora and associated species, consider introducing wild flower seed once the hay cut and grazing management have become consistent to further support this process.
5. Introduce grazing into compts 3a and 4b to diversify current woodland structure,
6. Lay the hedgerow which separates Watkins East from Centry Wood within the lifetime of this plan.



## 5.3 Connecting People with woods & trees

### Description

The Avon Valley complex sits within the South Devon AONB. Its location is within 6 miles of South Brent, 7 miles from Ivybridge, 8 miles of Totnes, 9 from Dartmouth and 3 from Kingsbridge and as such is within an easy drive of any of the main towns and villages in South Devon. The coastline is only 6 miles away at Start Bay to the east and Bigbury to the west. Torquay and Plymouth are both less the 15 miles away and Exeter 30 miles. While the wood serves the immediate population throughout the year, it is little used by those slightly further away. There is obviously a large influx of tourists to the area during holiday periods, who currently do not visit the wood.

Research needs to be done as to who uses the woods, other than local people from Woodleigh and others from Loddiswell and Kingsbridge who walk their dogs. Some horse riding takes place, believed to be from local stables, but this can raise complaints about the horses damaging paths and not staying on the bridleways. The local cubscout group uses the wood for orienteering type events.

Bedlime wood was the first acquisition that the Trust ever made and as such represents a very important part of the organisation's history, however there is no easy public access to this piece of woodland. Watkins Wood is named after the organisation's founder and the complex as a whole represents everything the organisation aims to do, through its PAWS restoration at Aveton to the creation of new woodland at Watkins. The addition of high quality ancient woodland, the river Avon and Torr Brook, wide rides, a number of large open grassland areas with fantastic views across Devon to Dartmoor, and an orchard, make the Avon Valley woods well worth a visit.

The local area is steeped in history with the now derelict Exeter to Kingsbridge railway line providing a picturesque railway station, a number of pretty stone railway bridges and a permissive path along the old railway line. Blackdown rings are only a couple of miles to the north. Devon Wildlife Trust's Andrews Wood nature reserve is few miles away which is a mixture of grassland, heath and secondary woodland. There are three or four cafes within easy reach of the wood, two can be reached on foot by the more intrepid walker and all are easily reached by car.

### Current Access and Infrastructure

The valley area is accessible from a public right of way (Woodleigh FP no. 4) at Loddiswell Station (disused) in the south and Topsham Bridge in the north (3.1km in total with 2km on Woodland Trust land). The valley path can become seasonally flooded and in places wooden boardwalks help with access across the many spring lines draining into the river Avon. The path runs the length of Woodleigh and Titcombe woods. The walk is challenging in places, but provides an un-interrupted woodland experience for some distance. The former railway bed (not in WT ownership) is currently used as a permissive path runs throughout the valley and parallel to the public right of way.

Although, the eastern boundary of Aveton Wood adjoins the old railway, it is not officially possible to enter the wood from the public footpath without crossing the old bridge (not in WT ownership), therefore Aveton Wood can only legally be accessed from Coombe Lane above Topsham Bridge. Here Public access is available via the main roadside entrance. Once in the wood there is a 2.7 km network of forest tracks around the site.

Watkins and Centry woods have 6.36 km of wide grassy rides through them, the majority fairly flat although some are steep as they get closer the river valleys. The more shaded ones can get muddy

in wet weather. There are 2 paths from Watkins Wood that lead down through Woodleigh Wood to the river to create a circular walk. These paths are variable in slope and surface with seasonal spring lines crossing them in places.

A public bridleway (Woodleigh BR no.2) crosses the eastern side of Watkins Wood from the road down to the Torr Brook. As part of the public consultation, on the creation of Watkins Wood, a further 2.56 km of permissive bridleway was created. This can be wet and muddy particularly along the Torr Brook.

Car parking is currently very limited with the only formal space being enough for 2 cars on the western side of Watkins Wood. The majority of visitors park on the road verges which are now becoming an eyesore, or by Loddiswell Railway Station and occasionally on the main forestry track at Aveton Wood. Even with this use of other parking there is only really parking for 10 cars, the majority of which is on a small but busy road.

Other than Welcome signs on the entrances there is currently no way marking or interpretation to inform or orientate the visitor.

#### Events

Centry Wood was designed with a large amount of open space so that events could be held on it, but none have taken place in recent years. The access to this space is down a very minor road in the village, with no formal parking, even if the main gate was opened and part of the area cordoned off for parking, the access would still make it very difficult for cars getting in and out. There are other locations that could be made into car parks (see below) and other open grassland areas that could be used for events without affecting Woodleigh.

#### Volunteering

There are no volunteer groups

#### Schools

The nearest school is at Loddiswell approximately 1 mile away with others further afield. The parking situation makes any use by minibuses etc very difficult.

#### Wider Community engagement

There has been no engagement with the wider community outside of Woodleigh Parish Council

### Significance

The Avon Valley complex is the largest area of publicly accessible woodland in South Devon.

In 2017 was selected for the first phase of the Trust's Welcome Sites Programme, the top 250 WT sites managed for people. It helps fulfil the Trust's aims 'Inspiring everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees'.

### Opportunities & Constraints

## Opportunities

The Avon Valley could be a much more valued woodland with the right promotion and facilities. The inclusion of the wood in the Welcome Sites project allows us to put the extra resources into the wood to enable more people to visit.

### Access and Infrastructure

1. Increased provision for car parking at Watkins Wood and formalising the parking at Aveton.
2. Some work to level some of the paths that are on a 'cross slope' contour to make them easier to walk in poor weather. Ride edge coppicing will also help to maintain good surfaces. Path mowing.
3. Interpretation boards and some way marking around the woods to show what we are doing and how the whole complex links up.
4. Produce leaflets that would be able to be put out in the nearby cafes.
5. Increase opportunities for local community groups to use the wood for orienteering etc.

### Events

The historical link to the Woodland Trust is an obvious 'peg' for the Trust to base corporate / membership events on. With an increase in car parking the wood is big enough and has a path network that could withstand a much larger range of user groups running outdoor experiences.

### Volunteering

There is a range of volunteering opportunities that could be utilised ranging from, monitoring and survey, practical management to leading guided walks around the woods.

### Schools

Research is required as to whether schools in the area would be interested in using the woodlands.

### Wider Community engagement

The woods could be promoted further afield through libraries, hotels or holiday cottage businesses etc, Increasing visitor numbers could also help the local cafes and pub in Loddiswell as there would be more of a focus for people visiting the wood and then stopping in a café.

### Constraints

1. The nature of the road network and parking means that some areas of the woods will also be remote or for the more able, but this in turn allows for a more diverse range of outdoor experiences.
2. A failure to get planning permission to improve the car parking would make it much more difficult to bring a wider range of people to the wood.
3. During prolonged rainfall in the winter parts of the public footpath from Loddiswell station to Topsham Bridge is flooded and impassable. Two open areas of Watkins Wood are periodically closed to the public to allow for grazing to take place.

## Factors Causing Change

1. Heavy rainfall and flooding from spring lines and the river could erode the paths - notably along the River Avon itself.
2. As trees mature and the canopy closes some paths may lose their grass surface and become muddy and wet.
3. Horse riders using other paths than the bridleways making the paths muddy and difficult to walk.

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

The Welcoming Site Programme will lead to a series of lasting upgrades that 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 through the variety of types of woodland will provide views and vistas of the local landscape and encourage the appreciation of the woodland both on the site and in the locality. The access will be managed to meet the required high standards of the Welcoming Site Programme and will provide a clear welcome, well maintained car parking, entrances, furniture, signs and other infrastructure as well as sustainable path and track surfaces across the variable ground conditions. An engagement plan will set out a developed programme of engagement activities and event further enhancing people's visit to the site. The site will be a truly valued resource in the local community and well respected.

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

1. Seek planning permission and extend the car parking capability at Watkins Wood (Compt 3a and 4a) and formalise it at Aveton (Compt 5a).
2. Upgrade the access along the public footpath along the river with Devon County Council Rights of Way team.
3. Grade some of the more uneven paths and implement a ride edge coppicing cycle to ensure paths are open and as dry as reasonably possible.
4. Install interpretation boards showing how the woods all fit to together and explain what we are achieving at each point.
5. Install way markers and ensure the permissive bridleway routes are clearly marked to limit the misuse of the rest of the wood.
6. Create a path higher up from the permissive bridleway surface along the Torr Brook so that it is passable for walkers.
7. Manage the area of Centry Wood closest to the village for formal use.
8. Develop engagement plan setting out programme of engagement activity within plan period.

## 5.4 Orchard

### Description

A small orchard (Compt 4d) of local varieties was planted in 2000 as part of the planting on Centry Wood with a large amount of open space left for use by local people. The orchard has struggled to develop due to the exposure to the elements from the south. A neighbour has since planted a hedgerow which has helped to protect the trees. A larger orchard will be created providing much better resource and feature as well as helping to conserve traditional Devon varieties of fruit trees. Interpretation will be provided about the types of fruit tree and their uses.

### Significance

South Devon orchards have declined, but are significant, locally distinctive woodland components of the South Hams AONB. The orchard will help conserve traditional cultivars and provide an educational resource.

### Opportunities & Constraints

The exposed nature of the site may make the establishment of the orchard take longer.

### Factors Causing Change

Fruit tree diseases, particular canker may affect the trees.

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

An orchard of standard trees, the species composition of which should be predominately local and rare varieties acting as a genetic resource for other orchards. The orchard should also provide a free resource of fruit to local people and visitors.

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

Reinvigorate the existing orchard and plant the larger one managing the grassland underneath to provide a neat welcoming area.  
Develop and install interpretation.

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## 6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By
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## APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	12.95	Mixed broadleaves	1950	High forest	No/poor vehicular access within the site		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>BEDLIME WOOD - Ancient semi natural woodland, upland oak with close affinity to NVC type W10 principally stored coppice with uniform structure and species range. Downy birch is frequent as are non-native sycamore and beech. Understory is dominated by hazel, with holly forming dense stands in some areas and regenerating sycamore and beech throughout. Rowan, hawthorn is rare in distribution. Sweet Chestnut forms dense canopy in the southern half of the wood. Ground flora, locally dominant bluebell, bramble and greater woodrush, locally abundant broad buckler-fern, frequent male-fern, scaly-male-fern, occasional wood anemone, bracken soft shied-fern, honey suckle and hard -fern.</p>							
2a	24.91	Mixed broadleaves	1950	High forest	No/poor vehicular access to the site		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

TITCOMBE WOOD - Ancient semi natural woodland, compartment has a mainly westerly aspect, sloping to the west, levelling close to the River Avon. To the north of the compartment the dominant species is stored sweet chestnut coppice along with pole stage beech, silver birch and ash dating from the post war period circa 1950. Occasional mature beech circa P1870 present throughout. Alder dominates the lower slopes adjacent to the river with occasional poplar. Pole stage ash is present midway through the stand established around 1965. To the south east there is a higher incidence of mature and spreading beech trees with an infill of sycamore that has been coppiced. The under storey is composed of hazel, elder, rowan and sycamore. Hazel coppice is abundant to dominant in a small number of areas within the compartment. Current structure indicates a more open canopy pre 1950 that may have been grazed and/or alternatively heavily felled during the war. Ground flora varies in abundance throughout the stand but comprises of avens, nettle, bryophytes including male, hard and harts tongue ferns, bramble, wood rush and dogs mercury.

WOODLEIGH WOOD (14.76ha) - Ancient semi natural woodland with westerly aspect. Oak and beech dating from the 1950s is more prominent at the northern end of the compartment, including a small spur of land planted with beech and hazel in 1985. Mature beech (est. P1870) are scattered throughout the lower western edge, tending to be confined to boundary features. Occasional mature pine and larch are also evident. Pole stage alder (P1965) is located along the lower wetter western boundary. The remaining areas are dominated by sycamore coppice which forms around 50% of the canopy, with oak, ash, silver birch and beech present. As with other ASNW compartments much of this regeneration dates from the post war period (1950-1960) indicating areas of significant felling in that period. Where the canopy structure permits hazel, elder, holly, beech, ash, sycamore and honeysuckle is abundant and dominates resulting in greater shading. A seasonal pool rises and floods an area adjacent to where the railway line embankment blocks an old bend in the original line in the river. Ground flora comprises of bluebell, dog's mercury, avens, bryophytes including hard and male ferns, ground ivy and bramble. Outcrops provide a moist habitat where mosses cover the exposed rock.

2b	2.70	Mixed broadleaves	1950	High forest	No/poor vehicular access to the site		Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site
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The northern section of Titcombe Wood is identified as PAWS on the Ancient Woodland Inventory. There are some mature Douglas fir in the wood but they are not causing a threat to the wood. It is similar in nature to the rest of Titcombe Wood. However it has been kept as a separate subcompartment to remain in line with the Inventory.

3a	23.70	Mixed native broadleaves	2004	Wood pasture			Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
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<p>AVETON WOOD - Former steep fields with established plantation of thinned Japanese larch (P1964). Close to the entrance a small area of selectively thinned Douglas fir (P1964), slopes down to a small stream feeding river Avon. Ground flora is abundant and species include bramble, bracken, ivy, mosses and ferns. Tree form is generally good. An area of P55 Coppiced wet woodland, including poplar present on a thin strip of wet ground surrounding the stream. Ground flora more diverse close to the stream.</p>							
3b	3.59	Open ground		Non-wood habitat			Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>Two grass fields at the top of Watkins West with good views across Devon. They are very grassy with some herbs, mainly compositae such as dandelions, hawkbits and the introduced fox and hounds. There is also some birds foot trefoil in the sward. Phosphate indices are a bit high at around 2.5, but should not inhibit an increase in floral diversity over time. The area is grazed with the aim of moving towards a consistent management of taking a hay cut and aftermath grazing.</p>							
4a	33.98	Mixed native broadleaves	2001	High forest	Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, Services & wayleaves		Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>Watkins East was established between 2000 and 2003. The area is surrounded and partly divided by Devon banks and hedges with some extensive open ground to retain views and an open aspect on high ground. Large open areas have been developed as permanent pasture. The land slopes steeply to the east from the road down to the Torr Brook which is lightly wooded along its entire length. The planting surrounds Bushclose copse a block of semi natural woodland which lies in the centre of the eastern slopes. Comprising mainly oak, ash and beech over occasional Hazel coppice with a bramble and bracken ground flora. A small unused barn is situated close to the edge of the copse.</p>							
<p>CENTRY WOOD -lies closest to the village of Woodleigh and was planted with native broadleaves in 2000 as part of the "Woods On Your Doorstep" project. Former arable land surrounded by Devon banks and hedges. A new hedge planted at the same time separates Centry Wood from Watkins Wood. The area falls gradually to the eastern hedges. The open ground area also includes a small orchard of South Devon Apple varieties and a large boulder of local stone as the Millennium Feature. This area makes up Compartment 4d.</p>							
4b	17.60	Mixed native broadleaves	2003	Wood pasture	Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, Services & wayleaves		Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

<p>Much of this area was planted in 2003 and protected by rabbit fencing rather than tree guards. There is a large amount of open space, partly due to electricity pylons running across the area. In the north eastern section of the compartment is a low lying area close to Torr Brook is bounded by native willow over a diverse area of grassland. Phosphate indices are very low at 0.9 making this area ideal to manage to enhance the diversity of plants in the grassland areas. There is a small copse of spruce and willow (0.15ha - P1993) adjacent to the stream and bridleway.</p>							
4c	2.43	Open ground		Non-wood habitat			Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>This former arable area was left open in response to the landscape assessment made when Watkins was being planted. It has good views to the east. The phosphate indices for the area is 3.5 which is very high. The grassland sward reflects this with a lot of coarse grasses, thistles and nettles. There are however some compositae, bird'sfoot trefoil and barren strawberry in the sward, so the diversity of the grassland is improving. managing the area through hay cutting and aftermath grazing show help control the ranker species, reduce phosphate levels and increase plant diversity over time.</p>							
4d	0.80	Other	2000	Non-wood habitat			Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>Most of this area is open species poor grassland with a small orchard in it which has struggled to develop over time.</p>							
5a	6.77	Mixed native broadleaves	2014	PAWS restoration			Ancient Woodland Site, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>This area is an ancient woodland site that was planted with Japanese larch in 1964. The topography is varied with a small stream valley running through the middle of it but overall the site slopes down to the east towards the river Avon. the section along the southern side of the stream was clear felled of douglas fir and restocked with broadleaf trees in 2003. Phytophthora ramorum was identified as present in 2013 and the larch clear felled under a statutory plant health notice in winter of 2013 / 14. It was restocked with native broadleaf trees and shrubs in March 2014 leaving wide margins at the ride edges to provide a more diverse habitat. Hazel was also planted without tree guards to try to encourage canopy closure quicker. The ground flora is varied with some very good stands of bluebells but other areas have much more bracken and bramble.</p>							
5b	1.09	Douglas fir	1964	PAWS restoration			Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site

<p>A stand of Douglas fir planted in 1964, on an ancient woodland site, along side the stream running through the site. It was thinned in 2013. Ground flora is a mix of ferns and bramble - some areas stand wet for much of the year.</p>							
5c	4.08	Douglas fir	1964	PAWS restoration			Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site
<p>This compartment was former ancient woodland planted with Douglas fir in 1964. It was thinned in 2003 and again in 2013. Natural regeneration is occurring but much of it is sycamore. Ground flora is varied with some areas of bluebells, while others have bracken and bramble.</p>							
5d	2.64	Mixed native broadleaves	2014	Wood establishment			Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>According to the county epoch series 1 OS maps the steep northern section down to the stream was open fields with an orchard to the western end. It was planted with larch in 1964 and clear felled along with the rest of the larch due to Phytophthora in 2013. Restocked at the same time as the rest of the site, the ground flora is dominated by bramble bracken and rushes. There are a number of spring lines that flow down the site to the stream at the bottom.</p>							
5e	3.33	Mixed native broadleaves	1950	High forest			Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>This area contains mature broadleaf woodland dominated by mature oaks and some beech and sycamore. Ground flora is frequent but declining, species include bluebell, bramble, honeysuckle, ivy and fern. Exposed rock present and appears to have been quarried, with small pits and gullies in places.</p>							

## Appendix 2: Harvesting operations (20 years)

Forecast Year	Cpt	Operation Type	Work Area (ha)	Estimated vol/ha	Estimated total vol.
2019	4a	Ride edge Coppice	0.20	291	58.3
2022	1a	Thin	12.95	2	20
2022	2a	Thin	24.91	2	40
2022	2b	Thin	2.70	4	10
2022	3a	Thin	23.70	2	50
2022	4a	Thin	33.98	1	30
2022	4b	Thin	17.60	1	10
2023	5a	Thin	6.77	1	5
2023	5b	Thin	1.09	15	16
2023	5c	Thin	4.08	15	61
2023	5d	Thin	2.64	2	5
2023	5e	Thin	3.33	6	20
2027	1a	Thin	12.95	2	20
2027	2a	Thin	24.91	2	40
2027	2b	Thin	2.70	4	10
2027	3a	Thin	23.70	2	50
2027	4a	Thin	33.98	1	30
2027	4b	Thin	17.60	1	10
2028	5a	Thin	6.77	1	5
2028	5b	Thin	1.09	15	16
2028	5c	Thin	4.08	15	61
2028	5d	Thin	2.64	2	5
2028	5e	Thin	3.33	6	20
2032	1a	Thin	12.95	2	20
2032	2a	Thin	24.91	2	40
2032	2b	Thin	2.70	4	10
2032	3a	Thin	23.70	2	50
2032	4a	Thin	33.98	1	30
2032	4b	Thin	17.60	1	10
2033	5a	Thin	6.77	1	5
2033	5b	Thin	1.09	15	16

2033	5c	Thin	4.08	15	61
2033	5d	Thin	2.64	2	5
2033	5e	Thin	3.33	6	20

## 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.