



# Westlaw Wood

# Management Plan 2019-2024

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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>	Westlaw Wood
<b>Location:</b>	Ebchester
<b>Grid reference:</b>	NZ096543, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 88
<b>Area:</b>	2.93 hectares (7.24 acres)
<b>Designations:</b>	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Local Nature Site, Tourism Restraint Area

## 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Summary Description

Westlaw Wood lies on the east side of the River Derwent Valley between Consett and Ebchester, in County Durham. It is an Ancient Semi-natural Woodland and Site of Nature Conservation Importance.

## 2.2 Extended Description

Westlaw Wood occupies a 3.01 ha site on the east side of the River Derwent Valley between Consett and Ebchester at East Law in Co. Durham. The wood is bound to the north and south by pastureland used for horse grazing and by the A694 to the east. Its western boundary is formed by the River Derwent, alongside which a strip of broadleaved woodland runs that links Westlaw Wood into the wider complex of woodland along the river valley. The bulk of the wood was purchased in 1990 with the help of the Derwent Valley Protection Society, whilst the embankment (0.16 ha) alongside the A694 was acquired as a gift from Durham County Council in 1994.

Westlaw Wood is an Ancient Semi-natural Woodland (ASNW) and Site of Nature Conservation Importance although 1.91 ha (sub-cpt 1a) in the middle of the site was clear felled in 1983. A fringe of mature broadleaf trees (sub-cpt 1b) was retained around the north, south and west edges of the site consisting mainly of oak and sycamore. Following felling, the wood appears not to have been replanted but has regenerated by natural means through coppice re-growth from cut stumps and colonisation, mostly by birch. Much of the coppice re-growth in the eastern side of sub-cpt 1a has been singled and the birch regeneration thinned out.

The main entrance to the wood is located directly off the A694. A flight of steps runs down the embankment from this entrance to join a permissive footpath that forks down through the wood to join the path that runs along the river's edge. These paths are well used by local people and are maintained by the Trust to encourage informal recreation in the wood. Although a legal right of management access exists across neighbouring land to the southeast, this remains undeveloped (except for a field gate in the southern boundary fence) and therefore, vehicular access into the wood is currently not possible.

By encouraging informal recreation and restoring the wood to high forest broadleaved woodland, the Trust is helping to fulfil its key corporate objectives of increasing enjoyment of woodland and preventing further loss of ancient woodland.

## 3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

### 3.1 Getting there

Pedestrian access to the wood is provided by a flight of steps down the embankment from an entrance off the A694. A second access point to the wood is located at the southwest corner of the site. However, it should be noted that the riverside path south of Westlaw is not a public right of way and public access to and from this land may not be available. Within the wood, approximately 600m of permissive footpath are maintained for walkers but visitors should note that the paths are un-surfaced and can be slippery in wet weather. No public rights of way exist within the wood.

Although no parking restrictions exist on the A694, visitors are not advised to park near the entrance to the wood, as the A694 is a fast and busy road. Limited on street parking can be found in East Law just north of Westlaw Wood. For visitors wishing to reach the wood by public transport, a bus stop is located on the A694 in East Law a few minutes walk along the road from the wood.

For those needing public conveniences whilst visiting the wood, public toilets can be found in Ebchester off the A694 near Vindomora Roman Fort. RADAR toilets are located in Consett at the bus station, Medomsley Road and in Company Row, Victoria Road (trading hours) Wetherspoons.

### 3.2 Access / Walks

## 4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

To see regeneration in sub-compartment 1a lead to a mixed broadleaf high forest woodland initially dominated by birch, ash and willow but ultimately with oak becoming more dominant among the canopy over the longer term (i.e. 50-100 years). The mature broadleaved high forest woodland canopy within sub-compartment 1b will be retained in its present form and left to grow on and become ancient trees. The whole wood will have a well-developed understorey dominated by holly and coppiced hazel but with other species, such as hawthorn and rowan also represented, along with regeneration from the canopy species. Once regeneration within sub-compartment 1a has sufficiently progressed, Westlaw Wood will broadly resemble lowland mixed broadleaf wood as described in the Forestry Commission's The Management of Semi-Natural Woodlands Forestry Practice Guide 3.

A minimum of 600m of permissive footpath incorporating two flights of steps and an entrance off the A694 will all be maintained at the wood to ensure continued public access is available.

Encouraging the regeneration of Westlaw Wood helps to fulfill the Trust's corporate objectives of improving woodland biodiversity and preventing further loss of ancient woodland, whilst maintaining the public access provision also contributes to another corporate objective of increasing enjoyment of woodland.

## 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 Informal Public Access

#### Description

Westlaw Wood provides people with an important local amenity where they can enjoy quiet recreation on foot over approximately 600 m of maintained permissive footpath that forms a circular route through the wood from the entrance off the A 694. Part of this footpath forms a riverside walk that continues southwards beyond Westlaw Wood. However, this path is not a public right of way and although continued access beyond the Trust's boundary appears unrestricted, if the public are welcome to walk there cannot be confirmed here.

#### Significance

Providing public access to woods is a cornerstone of the Trust's management approach to its properties and is encapsulated in its corporate objective of increasing enjoyment of woodland. Public access to the local countryside and particularly to the banks of the River Derwent is very limited around the Shotley Bridge and East Law area and therefore, the access provision provided by Westlaw Wood is important locally.

#### Opportunities & Constraints

The small size and isolated location of Westlaw Wood is likely to ensure it will never be more than a local amenity. Although no parking restrictions exist on the A694 alongside the wood, visitors are not recommended to park here due to the high speed of the vehicles using this single carriageway road. Limited on-road parking is available in East Law but this is very much on an ad hoc basis. The creation of a recreational path along the River Derwent is an aspirational objective recorded in Derwentside District Council's Local Plan. If this were to come to fruition, it would provide the opportunity to link Westlaw Wood into a much wider public access provision. Although visitors are free to walk along the riverside in Westlaw Wood it should be noted that the fishing rights along this stretch of the River Derwent belong to the previous owner of the woodland and remain private property.

#### Factors Causing Change

Ash die back will alter the canopy cover and some trees may have to be moved from the path edges as they become unsafe.

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

To ensure public access to the wood for quiet recreation on foot continues to be available in the future by maintaining a minimum of 600m of permissive footpath within the wood and a pedestrian entrance off the A694. Seek to link the wood into the wider landscape by encouraging and supporting the local authorities intention of trying to create a recreational path along the southern bank of the river.

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

The pedestrian entrance off the A694 and the flight of steps down the embankment, along with the second flight of steps in the middle of the wood will be formally inspected at least once every five years to ensure they are maintained in a safe and serviceable condition to facilitate continued public access. The network of permissive paths recorded on the legal map will be kept open for walkers by keeping them free of encroaching vegetation and litter by strimming path sides and collecting litter at least once a year. Public safety will be protected by carrying out a tree safety survey at least once every two years along paths and boundaries and by maintaining a site risk assessment of all hazards on site and carrying out any necessary work identified in order to minimise the dangers these present to visitors to the wood.

## 5.2 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

### Description

Westlaw Wood is recorded on the Natural England (English Nature) Ancient Woodland Inventory as a replanted ancient woodland site. However, after most of the wood was clear felled in 1983, replanting does not appear to have taken place and the wood seems to have regenerated naturally. Consequently, the wood is more correctly to be classed as Ancient Semi-natural Woodland (ASNW) albeit most of the trees in sub-compartment 1a are probably less than 20 years old. This observation is supported by the ground flora, which includes species, such as dog's mercury and blue bell that are typical of ancient woodland ground flora. Sub-compartment 1b contains the remnants of the former woodland cover and consists of mature oaks, sycamore and ash with some alder along the riverside.

### Significance

Westlaw Wood is ASNW, a nationally rare habitat type whose preservation and restoration is both a local and national target within biodiversity action plans. The wood is also designated a Site of Conservation Importance in Derwentside District Council's Local Plan. It's direct association with the River Derwent (another important natural habitat) and the fact that it links into a wider area of woodland cover increases its value as a habitat for both flora and fauna.

### Opportunities & Constraints

An opportunity exists at Westlaw Wood to help fulfil the Trust's corporate objective of preventing further loss of ancient woodland by allowing native broadleaved woodland to regenerate naturally across sub-cpt 1a.

### Factors Causing Change

Ash die back will alter the canopy cover and some trees may have to be moved from the path edges as they become unsafe. As per the condition assessment recommendations, at this point it may be convenient to start a small selective thinning programme and coppice some Hazel. Deer management may have to be introduced if enrichment planting and Hazel coppice is to be created.

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

To establish in sub-compartment 1a, high forest broadleaf woodland with a canopy initially dominated by a mix of birch, ash and willow, over time the amount of oak may increase. Mature high forest broadleaved woodland consisting of oak, ash and sycamore will also be maintained in sub-compartment 1b and allowed to grow on to become ancient trees. The understory throughout the wood will be dominated by hazel and holly, except near the river where willow is likely to be more prevalent.

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

The woodland is allowed to develop naturally, interference will only occur in the interests of safety. During this plan period the short term objective is to:

- Monitor the condition of the wood,

This will include the following operational works:

1. Condition Assessment
2. Monitor ADB as a trigger to plan enrichment planting
3. Remove Hazel coppice to create differing age structure and produce product.
4. Control of the deer populations will be undertaken where possible.

## 5.3 Watercourses

### Description

The River Derwent forms the western boundary to Westlaw Wood. It is one of the four major watercourses in Co. Durham and is a tributary of the River Tyne. Alongside Westlaw it flows through a broad channel measuring several metres wide and has a level bank on the wood's side.

### Significance

The River Derwent is one of only four major rivers in Co. Durham and is an important natural habitat for both humans and wildlife. This is recognised in the Durham Biodiversity Plan in which rivers and streams form one of the habitat action plans with set targets for improving water quality and biodiversity.

### Opportunities & Constraints

The direct association of these two natural habitats (i.e. the wood and the river) creates an environment of high biodiversity value that can be maintained and possibly enhanced through sensitive management of the riverbank. However, being next to a major watercourse will also impose constraints on what management options (e.g. chemical weed control) can be used and some works may require consultation and possibly approval from the Environment Agency. Because the fishing rights along this stretch of the River Derwent still belong to the previous owner of the wood, any work along the riverbank will need to take account of this.

### Factors Causing Change

None identified at this time

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

To ensure the River Derwent flowing alongside Westlaw Wood remains a vibrant natural habitat, benefiting both the biodiversity and the aesthetic character of the wood.

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

Because the River Derwent lies outside Woodland Trust ownership, no active management of the river itself is possible. However, any pollution or other problems identified will be reported to the Environment Agency. The Trust also supports the targets and initiatives encapsulated in the Durham Biodiversity Plan for rivers and streams through its sensitive approach to woodland management and by actively controlling invasive weeds that may colonise its land, such as giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed that are detrimental to the biodiversity of the river environment.

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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	1.91	Birch (downy/silver)	1983	High forest	Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Sensitive habitats/species on or adjacent to site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Informal Public Access	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SSCI, SINC etc), Tourism Restraint Area

Sub-compartment 1a covers 1.8 ha that was clear felled in 1983. Under the conditions of the felling licence, the area was scheduled to be replanted with 40% oak/beech and 60% larch. However, from the present mix of high forest and coppice woodland, it appears that the wood was not replanted after felling but regenerated from the cut stumps and through natural colonisation. Birch is the dominant tree species with lesser amounts of willow, cherry, ash, oak and sycamore. The odd larch and Scots pine are also present in the western half of the wood. Among the understorey holly and hazel are probably the most dominant shrubs but hawthorn, rowan and broadleaf regeneration also occur.

Open ground accounts for only a small amount (less than 5%) of the sub-compartment's area and is confined to the western end of the wood just behind the band of mature trees (sub-cpt 1b). Ground conditions in this area of the wood are damp and soft and this is reflected in the ground flora, dominated by ramson and butterbur. Overall, grass dominates the ground flora but blue bell, dog's mercury, cransbill and forgetmenots all occur, along with ubiquitous bramble.

A stream flows down to the River Derwent through the northern side of sub-cpt 1a, issuing from a large culvert that passes under the A694. At its eastern end, the stream occupies a steep sided gully but this disappears by the time the stream enters the western half of the wood. A permissive path runs down the middle of 1a from the entrance off the A694, then forks mid way into the wood and continues down the slope to join the riverside path (sub-cpt 1b) to form a circular route through the wood.

1b	1.10	Oak (pedunculate)	1900	High forest	Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Informal Public Access	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Tourism Restraint Area
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Sub-compartment 1b consists of a ribbon of mature trees running around the north, west and south boundaries that were retained when the rest of the wood was felled in 1983. The northern and southern strips are dominated by oak and sycamore with the occasional ash, whilst the western strip by the river is more mixed with alder and bay willow also occurring. Holly and hazel dominate among the understorey but a scattering of oak and other broadleaf regeneration also occurs.

As in 1a, the ground flora near the river is dominated by ramsons but blue bells also occur in considerable numbers. The trees are generally growing on level ground except along the northeast boundary where they occupy the slope above the stream. A permissive path runs alongside the river and up the slope through the southwest part of the sub-compartment.

## 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.