WOODLAND TRUST

Bewl Water Woods

Management Plan 2017-2022

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MAPS

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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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 or contact the Woodland Trust (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.

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. 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

Site name:	Bewl Water Woods
Location:	Wadhurst
Grid reference:	TQ657327, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 188
Area:	11.57 hectares (28.59 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

These three woods, namely Combewell, Pig and Frogwell are set against the stunning backdrop of Bewl Water. A network of rides in throughout the woods allow access to view the coppiced chestnut, statuesque oaks and spring flowers indicative of ancient woodland.

2.2 Extended Description

Bewl Water Woods are comprised of three woods, Combewell Wood & Pig Wood which adjoin each other and Frogwell Wood which is situated approx 250m to the north east. The woods are situated on the north west shore of Bewl Water reservoir on the Kent/East Sussex border. Situated south-east of the village of Cousley Wood they are in the High Weald AONB, noted for its significant concentration of ancient woodland (overall woodland cover 27%).

The woods are predominantly ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10a) and have a coppice with standards structure. Standards are predominantly oak and coppice is either pure sweet chestnut or mixed broadleaves (birch, hornbeam, alder, hazel etc). Ground flora over most of the site includes ancient woodland specialist species such as bluebell, wood anemone and yellow archangel. An area of Combewell Wood is not shown as ancient woodland on the NVC inventory and lacks some of the ground flora species and in some parts has a secondary woodland structure (no large trees or coppice stools). Underlying geology is Lower Tunbridge Wells Sand and soils are stagnogleyic argillic brown earths.

The woods were previously owned by the nearby Whiligh Estate. Norway spruce and larch were planted over some of the site in the mid 1960s. These crops obviously failed to establish well over the whole site and were also badly windblown in the storm of 1987. This allowed the previously coppiced areas to survive and continue to grow. The Woodland Trust then removed a lot of the remaining conifers in 1998 and created new rides in Pig Wood. Two small areas were clear-felled and replanted with oak. An area of inaccessible, windblown larch with the occasional standing conifer was left to develop naturally.

In parts of Pig and Combewell Woods the Trust initially continued the coppicing regime, with cants of sweet chestnut being cut in 1999, 2002 and 2009. However, due to the long extraction route, steep slopes and ink disease (Phytophthora spp) killing the sweet chestnut, a minimum intervention management regime has now been adopted.

Public access is available via the circular route around the reservoir or via the public footpath from Cousley Wood (along Butts Lane). Frogwell Wood has a short path through it with entrances onto public footpaths. Combewell and Pig Woods have two entrances off the circular reservoir route which allow access to a simple network of rides.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

General location:
Bewl Water Woods (Combewell, Pig and Frogwell Woods) are situated approx ¾ mile to the south-west and west of Cousley Wood, which is between the villages of Wadhurst and Lamberhurst. The woods are on the north-west shore of Bewl Water Reservoir and can only be reached by public footpaths.

General overview of paths & entrances:
Combewell and Pig Woods can be accessed by 2 squeeze gaps on the southern boundary, off the public footpath (which is also the Sussex Border Path) that runs along the reservoir shore. The rides and paths are unsurfaced, occasionally rutted and mostly on gentle to moderate gradients. Some areas can be boggy even in dry weather. There is a wooden bench in the centre of the 2 woods. Frogwell Wood (to the north-east of Combewell and Pig Woods) is also accessed by 2 squeeze gaps off the path around the reservoir (Sussex Border Path). A ride connects the 2 entrances. It is unsurfaced, level and muddy after wet weather. There is a wooden bench in the wood.

Parking:
There is no car parking close to the woods. The nearest car parking is in Wadhurst approx 1¼ miles to the south-west of Combewell Wood. The woods are reached on foot via ¼ mile of narrow lane and 1 mile of public footpath. Alternatively there is car parking and other facilities at the Bewl Water Visitors Centre, 1 mile south of Lamberhurst off the A21. There is a charge for parking which varies according to the day of the week and time of year telephone 01892 890800 for confirmation. About £4 per person 2010. The woods can then be reached by the Sussex Border Path (approx 2miles)

Public Transport:
Nearest train station: Wadhurst approx 2½ miles from Combewell Wood via B2099 (with pavement), narrow lane and public footpath.
Nearest bus stop: The Old Vine, Cousley Wood approx ¾ mile from the woods via public footpaths. The path mostly follows a surfaced lane. There are several services a day from Wadhurst and Lamberhurst (except Sundays and Bank Holidays). Information obtained fro Traveline website on 5/12/2006 (www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk) Tel: 08712002233.

Public Toilets:
Wadhurst village Commemoration hall (including disabled facilities accessible by RADAR key). Open 8am-6pm. Information can be obtained from Wealden District Council website (www.wealden.gov.uk/environment_and_transport). Tel 01892 653311.
Toilets also available at Bewl Water Visitor Centre (01892 890661).

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

Bewl Water Woods are characteristic of many ancient woods in the High Weald previously managed by coppicing. Various constraints now make it impractical to carry on coppicing at the site including a long extraction route across neighbouring land, seasonally-waterlogged soils and disease in the chestnut.

A degree of diversity in structure and tree species can be maintained throughout the majority of the site by a policy of minimum intervention, allowing the processes of natural succession to take place, i.e. no silvicultural operations such as coppicing or thinning. This will allow species such as oak to develop veteran characteristics in the long term. The dieback and death of the chestnut coppice will create some structural diversity by creating small-scale gaps that will regenerate with species such as birch, willow, alder and sycamore. Ash is likely to be a very minor component in the future due to disease. There will be an accumulation of both standing and fallen deadwood with some large diameter pieces that will add an important habitat currently absent from the site. There should be no damaging invasive species such as Rhododendron ponticum present on the site.

The site will continue to provide low-key public access, adding to the interest of the reservoir circular walk. Signs, entrances and benches will be maintained to provide a welcoming aspect to the woods. Paths will be maintained annually, in line with the site's Access Category C designation: low usage sites where paths are maintained.

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 Semi Natural Woodland

Description

Frogwell, Pig and the southern part of Combewell Woods are ancient semi-natural woodland of NVC W10a type (pedunculate oak/bracken/bramble - typical sub-community). In spring the ground flora is dominated by bluebell with other ancient woodland specialist plants such as wood anemone, yellow archangel, yellow pimpernel, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, wood speedwell and hairy wood rush. The coppice with standards structure in most of the wood indicates a long period of active management. The dominant coppice species is sweet chestnut, however Frogwell Wood has a more varied coppice understorey with hazel and hornbeam. Alder dominates in the wetter part of Pig Wood. Oak standards (up to 120 years old) are rare in the chestnut areas of Pig and Combewell but more frequent in Frogwell Wood.

Significance

The amount of ASNW left in Britain has been drastically reduced over the last century. Approximately 40% of England's ASNW is found in the south-east of England. ASNW is very important due to the continuity of woodland cover over hundreds of years which allows for a diverse range of wildlife and vegetation to develop.
Bewl Water Woods are situated within the High Weald AONB which has 27% woodland cover with a high proportion of ancient woodland. Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and the prevention of its loss is one of the main aims of the Trust.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:-
Poor or no management access for timber extraction and haulage.
Phytophthora affecting sweet chestnut.
Difficult terrain and soils.

Factors Causing Change

Dieback and windthrow of chestnut coppice due to Phytophthora.
Dieback of ash due to Hymenoscyphus fraxineus
Mammal damage: squirrel; deer.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Over the next 50+ years the longer-lived species such as oak will begin to acquire veteran characteristics (dead and decaying wood, rot holes etc). Younger cohorts of oak will begin to mature although many of the recently planted trees may not survive due to extensive squirrel damage. Unmanaged coppice, particularly chestnut, will begin to collapse through age, disease and windblow and a more varied structure and species composition will eventually develop with regenerating small gaps.
In order to keep the ride network open and safe for visitors, some periodic intervention will be necessary to deal with encroaching growth and dead/dying trees. However most standing deadwood will be retained in situ where it does not pose a threat to safety.
The woods will be free of damaging invasive species such as rhododendron.

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

During the next 5-year plan period there will be no silvicultural management of the woods. Works will be limited to dealing invasive species and maintaining the ride network.
- By 2022 the remaining rhododendron (<0.1ha) at south-western end of Cpt 3a will be eradicated.
- Dead and dying trees to fell along rides will be identified by tree safety surveys of Zone B every 2 years. Next due August 2019.

5.2 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

The two separate woods are only accessible on foot via public footpaths. There are 2 squeeze gap entrances to each wood from the 12.5 mile public footpath that runs round Bewl Water reservoir (part of the Sussex Border Path). The woods are approx 1.5 miles from the Bewl Water visitor centre (www.bewlwater.co.uk) where there is parking and other facilities. Other routes to the woods are from Cousley Wood to the north-west (3/4 mile) and Wadhurst to the south-west (1 mile).
The nearest settlements are Wadhurst (pop: 4,883) and Lamberhurst (pop 1,706).
The woods provide a short diversion from the popular reservoir footpath and allow visitors to experience ancient woodland with its displays of spring flowers and other wildlife. Each wood has a dedicated bench but no other visitor infrastructure.
Due to their remote location the woods are not heavily used by the public and have a WT access category C: less than 5 visitors a day.
There is no public access beyond the western end of Combewell Wood where the ride comes to a management gate.

Significance

The site allows for quiet informal recreation as a contrast to the more active pursuits taking place on and around the reservoir.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints.
Some sections of the rides are prone to waterlogging.
The site is remote from any larger villages and has no nearby parking so does not get many visitors.

Factors Causing Change

Any increase in numbers of visitors using the reservoir facilities is likely to increase visitor numbers to the woods.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The woods will continue to be accessible by visitors on foot who will enjoy their tranquillity and naturalness. In time the woods will contain large old trees and regenerating patches that will continue to attract a range of woodland wildlife in contrast to the aquatic habitat of the adjoining reservoir. Spring displays of bluebells and wood anemones will continue to provide a draw for visitors.

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

During this plan period current visitor numbers will be catered for by providing a network of safe paths & rides, access points and improved signage. This will be achieved through:
- Annual path cut and entrance maintenance.
- Replacement of existing entrance signage (2017).

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By

APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	2.28	Oak (pedunculate)	1900	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access to the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Frogwell Wood. Ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10a). Oak standards (approx. P1900) over mixed coppice (birch, hazel, sweet chestnut, hornbeam). Also ash, hawthorn, elder and holly present. There is a large decaying veteran beech tree over a clearing with bramble and a sinuous central ride with coppiced edges. Ground flora is dominated by bluebell and wood anemone. Disease present in sweet chestnut and ash.							
2a	4.18	Sweet chestnut	1970	Min-intervention	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/ Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site
Pig Wood. Ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10a/W6?). Oak standards over mixed coppice (sweet chestnut, birch, alder, ash). In 1970 it was partly converted to conifers (Norway spruce and larch) which were subsequently badly windblown in 1987. Most remaining conifers were removed in 1998. The northern half of the compartment is largely a valley with a small stream flowing into the adjacent reservoir. This area is dominated by alder. The south east part of the compartment has a large man-made depression; possibly a quarry, marl-pit or iron-ore digging. In 1998 a small area in the west of the compartment was restocked with oak. A veteran ash of 3.43 metre circum. and notable oak of 3.15 metres stand on the northern edge.							
3a	2.69	Sweet chestnut	2000	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access to the site, Sensitive habitats/species on or adjacent to site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site

Combewell Wood. Ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10a). Predominantly sweet chestnut coppice with oak standards. Also birch, hazel, willow and privet present. Ground flora dominated by bluebell with bracken, bramble and foxglove. Coppice has been cut in 3 cants, the last one in 2009. There is extensive Phytophthora (ink disease) throughout the compartment affecting the sweet chestnut. Towards the south west of the sub compartment sycamore coppice becomes more prevalent. Rhododendron ponticum has been present in this area but now largely controlled.							
3b	2.40	Oak (pedunculate)	1950	Min-intervention	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/ Rocky ground	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site
Combewell Wood. Part ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10).The western part of subcompartment is young oak high forest with an understorey of hazel, sweet chestnut and hawthorn. This grades into secondary woodland with aspen and birch. In the middle of the sub compartment is a large man-made depression similar to that in Subcpt 2a. The eastern part of the sub compartment is mixed coppice with oak standards and occasional conifer. A small area was cleared and replanted with oak in 1998. The southern boundary has a woodbank with overstood coppice of hornbeam, field maple, sweet chestnut and wild cherry. Ground flora is dominated by bluebell with bracken and bramble in open areas.							

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.