



Willesley Wood

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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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 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:	Willesley Wood
Location:	Ashby de la Zouch
Grid reference:	SK333142, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 128
Area:	56.60 hectares (139.86 acres)
Designations:	Local Nature Reserve, National Forest

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Set in the heart of England's new National Forest, Willesley Wood is a jewel of a place. Millions of trees have been planted during the creation of the forest and the very first tree went into the ground at Willesley. That was nearly half a century ago and the wood is now a fascinating mosaic of maturing woodland, flower meadow and wetland.

2.2 Extended Description

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

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

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

wetland.

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

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

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

Thortit lake was formed in the early 1980's by gradual subsidence caused by the old mining works. The lake is shallow 3-4 feet and stocked with carp, pike and tench. It is surrounded by marginal wetland fringes important to amphibians and water fowl.

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

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

- Farmland, probably pasture.
- Had extensive hedgerows and wayside trees.
- Had some gorse heath-land.
- Had some plantation woodland.

- The site subsequently developed into marshland, possibly following subsidence caused by mining locally and has since progressed to woodland over the last 100 years.
- Grassland / meadow

The main grassland area at Willesley Wood is situated to the north of Thortit Lake, the area has only been mown once a year and all arising left in situ. Coarse grasses with locally dominant thistle, docks and nettles dominate the area. Species of interest include Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) and Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*). The habitat is valuable for Lepidoptera and other insects.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

By bus:

The nearest bus stop is approximately 1km (0.6 mile) from Willesley Wood at the village of Donisthorpe. There are buses (Midland Classic 19 or 19A) from Ashby-de-la Zouch (Market Street) to Donisthorpe every hour from Monday to Friday and a limited service on Saturdays.

By train:

Burton-upon-Trent station is approximately 16km (10 miles) from Ashby-de-la-Zouch. For further information on public transport, contact Traveline on 0871 200 2233 or visit traveline.org.uk

By car:

From the centre of Ashby-de-la-Zouch take the Ashby Road towards Measham and turn right just before Willesley Park Golf Club. Turn left at the first crossroads (1.5 miles) and park near the first gate on the right. Alternatively, continue past the crossroads for 0.4km (0.25 mile) to the entrance of Oakthorpe Colliery Picnic Site, which is signposted. Its surfaced car park is open from dawn until dusk.

By foot:

Willesley Wood is about 1km (0.6 mile) east of the village of Donisthorpe along Ashby Road.

3.2 Access / Walks

There are a number of ways into Willesley Wood. There are two points of access along Donisthorpe Road and five from Willesley Woodside, which forms the eastern boundary. Willesley Wood can also be accessed from Oakthorpe Picnic Site, on Ashby Road, and from Pasture Lane, which is on the wood's western boundary. Cars can be parked on Willesley Woodside or at the picnic site.

Around 8km (5 miles) of managed footpaths give access to all parts of Willesley. They are mostly mown grass and do sometimes become muddy in wet weather. If you do leave a path take care (especially if you have young children with you) as steep-sided drainage ditches flow into the lake from the east and the south-east.

An all-abilities footpath makes a small circuit of the western end of the wood. There are a number of benches along the way that offer good views of Thortit Lake. The path can be accessed from Oakthorpe Picnic Site.

A leaflet entitled 'Walks in the Heart of the National Forest' sets out a 13.7km (8.5 mile) walking route that links Moira, Donisthorpe and Willesley Wood. It can be downloaded from the National Forest website's www.nationalforest.org - look for it in the 'downloads' section. The route is made up of three separate sections, each of which can be completed on its own. The Willesley Wood circuit is 3km (2 miles) long.

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 Secondary Woodland

Description

The 11-acre wood is a wet woodland typified by alder and poplar and is of secondary origin. The area is damp in places with ditches running southeast to northwest. Black poplar is a notable feature here. The understorey is dominated in places by hawthorn, with much of the ground remaining shaded and barren. Bramble exists in some of the well-lit areas. Pendulous sedge, bluebell, dog's mercury and Goldilocks buttercup can also be found.

Significance

Wet woodland of ancient semi-natural origin now extends over only 30ha in Leicestershire and Rutland. Secondary wet woodland has not been catalogued but the combined total area of these is not thought to exceed 40ha. Wet woodland is also a rare habitat at a national level.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:

Wet woodlands hold species-rich plant communities, with a number of species of county importance. Rare invertebrates are also well represented, especially beetles and craneflies. Our main opportunity was in protecting this woodland (as a result of the Woodland Trust owning it in perpetuity) and with management encouraging it to develop into a more varied woodland, which contains a mixture of trees species, age classes and ground flora diversity.

Constraints; The woodland is very wet and this needs to be born in mind in relation to any forestry operations undertaken within the woodland both from a practical and habitat conservation perspective. A number of ditches and wet flushes are present within this area.

Factors Causing Change

Ash die back is present on site and will likely be an issue as we move forward into the future.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To be managed as high forest the intention being to encourage the on-going resilience and sustainability of the woodland and its associated flora and fauna through encouraging a range of tree species types of varying age classes primarily through the promotion of natural regeneration. All large old trees and resulting dead wood will be retained. Wind blown trees will be left in situ and allowed to decompose naturally where it is safe to do so. This will provide potentially rich habitat for lichen, fungi, invertebrates and other woodland fauna including suitable habitat for bat roosts. Periodic thinning and harvesting operations based on the Woodland Condition Assessments will take place in 11-acre wood and will be used as a tool to promote the above. Any thinning work is likely to take place once every 8 to 15 years based on assessment.

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

To carry out a 10% thin of stems within the woodland favouring species other than ash for retention the aim being to increase light levels and encourage / release pockets of natural regeneration in 2020.

To carry out an ecological survey of the woodland to identify areas of interest to inform thinning operations in 2020.

5.2 Mixed Habitat Mosaic

Description

Thortit Lake was formed in the early 1980's by subsidence caused by old mine workings. The lake is approximately 3-4 feet deep. The lake edge consists of marginal reeds and rushes, Wood clubrush (*Scirpus sylvaticus*) is present and is rare in the county. Bullrush is abundant and spreading and the area is being invaded by willow scrub in places.

Another area of the lakeside marginal vegetation is dominated by carr-like scrub, predominantly willow and alder. A marshy area intergrades with the 'carr' and is predominantly wetland herbaceous vegetation, which then leads into flower rich grassland. This is a sheltered area close to the old mine shafts. The area grades from the marsh and lake edge at the north and contains such species as common spotted and pyramidal orchids. Some willow and alder scrub is beginning to encroach into the area.

Significance

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

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities

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

Constraints

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

Dog mess in the wildflower meadow makes it impossible to cut this area for hay and hence remove the arisings.

Factors Causing Change

Natural Succession To...Willow and birch scrub, Silting up of Thortit lake

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain the diverse structure of habitats of lake, lakeside margin, scrub willow 'carr', marsh floodplain and the area of flower rich grassland.

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

The flower rich grassland will be mown annually in September.

Carry out a full ecological survey of the wetland habitat to determine current condition of this area and to inform future management in 2019.

Investigate the potential to cut and remove the arisings from the meadow rather than cutting to mulch (please see constraints) in 2018.

5.3 Informal Public Access

Description

Public access on foot is available throughout the whole site. An extensive network of rides and paths are located throughout the woodland and connect well into the surrounding rights of way network.

Most of the path network consists of grass tracks some of which get very wet in winter. A 2 Kilometer surfaced route around the lake for visitor use should be in place by the end of summer 2017 that should help to mitigate this issue.

Car Parking facilities are available at the adjacent Oakthorpe picnic site and access can also be gained from Willesley Woodside Lane along the Northeastern boundary.

Significance

Willesley Wood is a substantial block of woodland habitat within the Heart of the National Forest area with 24/7 public access. The property ties in well into the surrounding access network and other attractions nearby such as Hicks Lodge and Conkers as well as Leicestershire County Council owned Oakthorpe Colliery Picnic Site immediately adjacent. The National Forest Companies Black to Green Project aims to promote the various Woodland sites and attractions within the Heart of the Forest, Willesley Wood being a key component of that larger project, in addition the Woodland Trust is aiming to make considerable improvements to public access and the visitor experience at this property with the installation of a 2 km surfaced track in the summer of 2017 and upgrades to entrance furniture, interpretation etc.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities

Located in the Heart of the National Forest and connects well into the existing rights of way network and with other local attractions. Plenty of opportunity for partnership working with the National Forest Company, Leicestershire County Council and the Forestry Commission pertaining to access and promotion.

Constraints

The property gets very wet in the winter months with some paths becoming impassable, muddy and flooded.

Occasional unauthorised use by horse riders, cyclists and motorbikes.

Factors Causing Change

N/A

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain the paths, tracks and entrances in perpetuity and allow continued 24/7 access into the property. To look for and make the most of any opportunities for partnership working with the National Forest Company, Leicestershire County Council and the Forestry Commission to improve or add to the access network and the promotion of Willesley Wood.

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

Cut five times annually all rides within the areas of new planting in May, June, July, August and September as part of the Estates Maintenance Contract.

Maintain/repair all gates, stiles, information boards, and welcome signs throughout the period of this plan as part of the Estates Maintenance Contract.

To construct a 2 kilometer surfaced circular track around the lake to improve access for visitors particularly during the wet winter months and improve existing entrance during the summer of 2017.

5.4 New Native Woodland

Description

Willesley Wood consists primarily of new native woodland plantation planted over a 3-year period from 1991-1994. The plantation is primarily on the north and south slopes of the gentle valley running east to west and was designed to accentuate the valley shape and form with the lake as the central feature. Planting is predominantly oak / ash with faster growing silver birch, willow and cherry planted in a block structure. Field maple, guelder rose and holly are situated towards the outside edges of the planting areas.

2002 saw the planting of a 1 hectare block of native woodland in-conjunction with the Royal British Legion which contains a grove with a bench and memorial stone.

In 2003 a second 16.59 hectare area was planted at Willesley Wood and was formerly know as Willesley Extension, this was planted with mixed broadleaves in the Spring of 2003. The bulk of this area consists of plantation but the compartment also includes 2 small areas of woodland at opposite ends of the Green Lane which enclose former, now capped, mine shafts.

Significance

The new native plantation is a considerable addition to the Heart of the National Forest area, improving biodiversity through habitat creation and providing an important place for recreation for the general public. It also contributes a great deal along with similar schemes in the area in beautifying what was once an industrially scarred landscape.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:

To work in partnership with the National Forest Company, Local People / Groups, The Forestry Commission and Leicestershire County Council on habitat improvement and commercial thinning / harvesting operations.

Constraints:

Lack of infrastructure associated with harvesting operations.

The area can get very wet in the winter months.

Ash Die Back is present and prevalent through the new woodland stands.

Factors Causing Change

Ash Die Back - Prevalent through stands of the plantation, particularly the Royal British Legion grove area. It will have a significant impact going forward into the future.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To promote the development of diverse, resilient high forest with a mix of species and age classes capable of regenerating naturally. Thinning and Harvesting works based on the Woodland Condition Assessments and which will involve collaborative working with local organisations and groups including the National Forest Company, will be used as tools to promote the sustainable and resilient development of the woodland habitat. Any thinning work will likely take place in the short to medium term once every 5 to 10 years based on assessment.

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

To carry out a Woodland Condition Assessment at the start of the next Management Plan Review in 2022.

To carry out a 25% thin of the new native woodland blocks in 2020 favouring the removal of ash over other species.

To work with the Heart of the National Forest Woodfuel Group who will be thinning and managing a small proportion of the new native plantation near to the Ashby Road from the winter of 2017 onwards.

5.5 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Access/Infrastructure

Willesley Wood was planted in the mid 1990s, with an extension created in 2003, forming a 58 hectare site within the Heart of the National Forest. The main access to the site is via the Oakthorpe Colliery Picnic Site and car park, located off Willesley Lane/Ashby Road and managed by the local County Council. In addition there are 9 other entrance points into the wood; 6 along Willesley Woodside, 1 from Willesley Lane, and 2 further along the track from the car park and picnic area. A public footpath runs diagonally across the site; a small section of the path from the main entrance is surfaced, and work to install a much larger, fully surface circular route around the site is due to start imminently. Currently the paths are predominantly grass tracks which can become very muddy during winter and in periods of wet weather.

Various types of signage are in place across the wood; much of which is old and in need of replacement. First impressions of the site are poor; on turning off the road there is no indication that there is a WT site at the bottom of the track, and even once in the car park - which is not well-maintained - it is not clear to visitors where they should go to access the wood. Other access points generally have a WT sign on entry, and the entrance from Willesley Lane has a large 'asda' sign facing out to the road - this could be deemed misleading as this doesn't symbolise the main entrance and there is nowhere to park here.

General communication drivers

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

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

- The lake in the centre of the site acts as a natural focal point for visitors when walking through the wood.
- The meadow areas are home to some note-worthy species, including orchids, meadow cranesbill and corncockle and are also havens for butterflies and other pollinators
- The area has a rich industrial heritage and remnants of this can be seen across Willesley Wood.
- A memorial grove for the Royal British Legion

The current visitor offer at Willesley Wood is a low key one, and reflects the Trust's original intention of creating places for quiet, informal recreation. The wood is quiet and networks of paths allow people to explore and experience independently without guidance or facilitation from the WT. There is scope to develop the visitor offer at Willesley, particularly in light of its location within the National Forest.

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

The Woodland Trust has 17 other sites within the National Forest, the closest being Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Wood, Top Wood, Penguin Wood and Foxley Wood. The National Forest covers 200 square miles of the Midlands (Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire) and is transforming the landscape via woodland creation with the aim of linking the two ancient Forests of Charnwood on its Eastern fringe with Needwood Forest to its West. The National Forest Company is leading the creation of the forest, with a vast array of partners also contributing, and is this year (2017) celebrating its 25th anniversary.

However, Willesley Wood is the only WT wood that falls within the Heart of the Forest boundary; a geographically defined area of around 10 square miles that is a focus for much activity. Nearby attractions/facilities include Conkers (<http://www.visitconkers.com/>), Hicks Lodge (<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/hicks lodge>), Ashby de la Zouche castle (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/ashby-de-la-zouch-castle/>) and the Moira Furnace Museum and Country Park (<https://www.moirafurnace.org/>). There may be significant potential to link into these facilities in future. There is also a fishing lake and golf course very close to Willesley Wood, and a scout campsite.

In addition the National Forest Company, in partnership with the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, is currently delivering an HLF project, Black to Green, which covers the Heart of the Forest area - <http://www.blacktogreen.org.uk/>. The remit of the project is to conserve and enhance the industrial heritage and natural history within the Heart of the Forest and is working to achieve this in a multitude of ways, including events, volunteering opportunities and interpretation.

Events

Willesley Wood is not currently part of the central region's event programme. The site has potential to work well for a variety of events and engagement activities, including themed guided walks, community picnics, and Nature Detectives family activity days. There may also be scope to work in partnership with other nearby facilities to hold joint events. However, a limiting factor is likely to be the size of the car park, and there is no scope currently to create any further parking provision.

Volunteering

There is currently 1 volunteer formally attached to the site, in the capacity of Woodland Warden, with another individual who is very supportive of our work and who will hopefully be registering soon. The National Forest Woodfuel Group, although not direct Woodland Trust volunteers, are also active onsite.

Schools

As far as we are aware, the site is not currently used by schools, but there are many close by: Donisthorpe Primary School, Moira Primary School, Albert Village Community Primary School, Oakthorpe Primary School, Blackfordby St Margarets C of E Primary School, Ashby Willesley Primary School, Measham C of E Primary School, Woodcote Primary School, Willesley County Primary School, Packington C of E Primary School, Ashby Hill Top Primary School, Ivanhoe College, Lewis Charlton School, Manor House School

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

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

Wider community engagement

Ashby has a variety of clubs and societies: <http://www.ashbyonline.co.uk/main.php?Clubs+and+Societies&category=1008>, as does Measham and the surrounding villages: <http://www.meashamparish.co.uk/findmynearest.html?category=22%3A9255>. The Black to Green project is very active in the communities surrounding Willesley, working to engage residents with the National Forest's built and natural heritage, so there may be scope to link in with this.

Significance

As already mentioned, Willesley Wood is located in the Heart of the National Forest, and provides an important free, accessible woodland as part of the wider National Forest landscape. The Woodland Trust has a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Forest Company, so sites such as Willesley will remain a key part of our regional portfolio going forward. Its links to the area's industrial mining heritage are a valuable asset; the National Forest as a whole is a brilliant example of landscape scale change. 25 years ago the landscape was largely characterised by the remains of the once predominant open-cast mining industry, with very little woodland or accessible green space. Now the area has a plethora of thriving woods for both local communities and, increasingly, visiting tourists to enjoy. The remnants of the mining industry that are present at Willesley Wood are an important reminder of and link to its past. Significantly, Willesley was the location for the planting of the very first tree associated with the creation of the National Forest back in 1991.

Today Willesley Wood is an important site for various wildlife species, in particular those that are associated with the meadows and grassland areas. Over 100 bird species have been recorded on site (including all three spp of woodpecker) and it has the largest population of black poplar in Leicestershire. It is a popular site with walkers (with and without dogs) and its good links via the PROW network to the wider National Forest are a real strength. In addition, the presence of the Royal British Legion 'reflection' grove provides a calm oasis among the hubbub of the Heart of the Forest.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:

Access/Infrastructure

The surfaced track that is due for completion at the wood in August 2017 will vastly improve the level of visitor experience we are able to provide at Willesley Wood. In addition, some of the entrances into the wood are also being reprofiled and updated at the same time. We need to ensure all of the access points into the wood have strong WT branding (while also highlighting the wood's position within the National Forest) and consistent entrance and exit messaging. The main entrance needs signing more clearly from the car park, and the car park in general needs some work undertaking to ensure it is welcoming to visitors (something we would do in partnership with the NFC and County Council).

As part of the Black to Green project, the NFC are soon to install a new interpretive feature in an area adjacent to Willesley Wood, just up from the picnic area and car park. This is close to what is currently one of our secondary entrances, but if footfall around this area will be increasing it would

be sensible to make this a primary entrance, to encourage people to visit the wood as well as experiencing the interpretation.

Additionally, there may be potential to create a walking link between Willesley and Hicks Lodge, from the site entrance off Willesley Lane. Again, this may necessitate upgrading this entrance so those entering on foot from this direction are greeted with a quality welcome.

General Comms Drivers

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

Events

Events could work really well at Willesley, particularly things such as guided walks and nature detective sessions. There may be scope to link in with wider programmes such as the National Forest Walking Festival which happens annually in May.

Welcome Sites

See visitor basics audit for Willesley Wood (separate document).

Volunteering

The Woodfuel Group already use part of the site for their activity; there may be opportunity to strengthen the WT link with them, as they are not directly our volunteers. There may be opportunity to recruit further Woodland Warden type roles. Additionally, the National Forest should be considered as a focus for wider WT initiatives, such as Talking Trees and Observatree

Schools

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

Wider community engagement

There may be potential to engage with some of the surrounding community groups, such as the nearby scouts, photography groups, walking groups etc, by delivering tailored outreach and onsite activities to help them connect with the wood and the WT cause.

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

Constraints:

Access/Infrastructure

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

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

General Comms Drivers

We need to be mindful of all of the other activities/offers within this area, and be confident in what makes our unique/different, or how we link in with others. Strong brand presence/awareness may be

more difficult to achieve.

Events

As with many WT sites, the limited amount of parking is likely to be a big constraint on our ability to run events at this site. We should look to utilise the site during typically non-busy periods, or explore alternative parking solutions

Volunteering

Staff capacity to directly manage further volunteers is limited.

Schools

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

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

Wider community engagement

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

Factors Causing Change

The forthcoming path installation will hugely increase the accessibility of the woodland. The new interpretation hub being delivered on adjacent land by the Black to Green project may change the access focus for the wood, and we will need to respond proactively to this.

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

Long term Objective (50 years+)

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

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

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

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

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

Ensure successful implementation of the path works and associated infrastructure improvements, SepteCompleted

Establish working relationship with Leicestershire County Council and Black to Green project staff in order to progress car park improvements (including brown signage from road), contacts made

Create costed action plan and timeline for car park improvements - to include entrance point from road, thinning works, signage upgrades and signposting to Willesley Wood / interp hub from car park, Completed

Implement car park work programme, Apr 2018

Ensure all access points have up-to-date WT welcome signage (with NF / funder branding where appropriate) - see entrance survey for details, December 2017

Design, create and install a welcome/orientation point at the entrance closest to the car park - to include a map which highlights surfaced path, basic info on site - history/wildlife, info on WT cause and potentially flexible space for posters/seasonal info and messaging. Replicate this at other key entrances (near interp hub, potential link with Hicks Lodge, main entrance from Willesley Woodside), Apr 2018

Update the signage relating to the Royal British Legion (in consultation with them), Apr 2018

Undertake a review and refresh of online information and make site map available to download once created, May 2018

Create an interpretation plan for the site, highlighting key messages and stories we want to share with visitors, and the best mechanisms for doing this (might be way marked trails, sculpture/installations, interactive info points etc etc), Oct 2017

Trial at least one small event at Willesley Wood during 2018 or 2019 (potentially link in with Walking Festival) to see what uptake is like, December 2019

Make contact with local primary schools once site map is created; promote GTSA and explore relationship with Oakthorpe Primary in particular with potential for use of the site as a learning resource, September 2018

Ensure National Forest is a focus for volunteer recruitment for schemes such as the Talking Trees network, Jan 2018

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	29.35	Oak (pedunculate)	1992	High forest	People issues (+tve & -tve)	Informal Public Access, New Native Woodland	National Forest
<p>This area is predominantly tree planted blocks. Major species include oak, ash, silver birch, willow species. Lesser species are guelder rose, field maple and holly. Cherry was also planted but has suffered high mortality, suspected to be caused by bacterial canker.</p> <p>A 1ha block was planted in February 2002 situated to the north of the 11-acre are of mature woodland, this forms part of Ashby de la Zouch's Royal British Legion Remembrance area and is used by them periodically throughout the year. Species planted include ash, oak, hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel. Black poplar cutting were also taken from the mature trees in the existing mature woodland. Ash die back is unfortunately prevalent throughout the young ash trees in this area.</p> <p>Open areas of grassland are also located within this compartment, dominated by coarse grasses with locally dominant thistles, docks and nettles. Some rare species are also present such as Corncockle (<i>Agrostemma githago</i>) and Meadow cranesbill (<i>Geranium pratense</i>).Hedgerows surround the site and are mostly 2-5 metres tall.</p> <p>The hedgerows along the north and western boundaries are the most complete with few gaps. They are unusual in having very few hawthorn, but a lot of hazel and field maple. It is possible that they are pre-enclosure features.</p>							
2a	6.69	Ash	1920	High forest	Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, Mostly wet ground/exposed site	Informal Public Access, New Native Woodland	Local Nature Reserve, National Forest

Compartment 2 is an area of mature secondary woodland. It is split into four areas, 11 acre wood and a shelterbelt on the south-western boundary and two small woods in the former "extension" area (compartment 4a). Predominant species is ash with some oak and poplar. Sycamore is common along the boundary edges and towards the west. The area is damp in places with ditches running southeast to northwest throughout the main block.

Black poplar is a notable feature, probably following pre-existing hedge lines through the 11 acre wood. The understorey is dominated in places by hawthorn, with much of the ground remaining shaded and barren. Bramble exists in some of the well-lit areas. Pendulous sedge, bluebell, dog's mercury and goldilocks buttercup.

The shelterbelt on the south-western boundary is made up of oak, ash, sycamore, and poplar hybrids. The area is located on the edge of a tip or possibly along the edge of the old canal side. Some of the old ash has potential for bat roosts. Hawthorn and elder form the main understorey species.

3a	5.14	Goat willow	1970	Min-intervention	Mostly wet ground/exposed site	Informal Public Access, New Native Woodland	Local Nature Reserve, National Forest
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Compartment 3 is made up of the lake and immediate areas of surrounding land. The lake, lakeside margin, scrub willow 'carr', marsh, floodplain and part of an area of flower rich grassland are all included within this compartment (see conservation map for exact locations).

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

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

4a	15.56	Ash	2003	High forest		Informal Public Access, New Native Woodland	National Forest
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This compartment is predominantly new planting which was undertaken in the Spring of 2003. The 13.15 ha area was planted with 25,000 trees and 4,000 shrubs. The species distribution was Ash 50%, Oak 12.5%, Field maple 5%, Silver birch 4%, Hawthorn 2%, Blackthorn 2%, Purging buckthorn 2%, Guelder rose 4% and Hazel 4%.

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

Appendix 2: Harvesting operations (20 years)

Forecast Year	Cpt	Operation Type	Work Area (ha)	Estimated vol/ha	Estimated total vol.
2017	1a	Thin	1.00	5	5
2018	1a	Thin	1.00	5	5
2019	1a	Thin	1.00	5	5
2020	1a	Thin	29.32	9	250
2020	1a	Thin	1.00	5	5
2020	1a	Thin	1.00	5	5
2020	2a	Selective Fell	6.61	15	100
2020	4a	Thin	15.51	16	250
2021	1a	Thin	1.00	5	5

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.