



The Birches

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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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 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:	The Birches
Location:	Ambergate
Grid reference:	SK345514, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 119
Area:	3.73 hectares (9.22 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Tree Preservation Order

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Overlooking the Derwent Valley, this is part of a network of woods that stretches north up the valley and includes the larger Shining Cliff ancient woodland. There are a number of paths through the wood and a public footpath on the western boundary. The southerly footpath is part of the long distance Derwent Valley Heritage Way.

2.2 Extended Description

The Birches was purchased in 1993 following a fundraising campaign by local people. Grants and donations were also received from Derbyshire County Council, Ambergate District Council The Countryside Commission and the Youth Hostel Association.

The Birches occupies a very visible, easterly aspect overlooking the Derwent Valley and forms a southerly point of a network of woods that stretch northwards up the valley including the Shining Cliff, SSSI, ancient woodlands close by, and it is likely that the wood would have formed part of this ancient woodland complex in the historical past. The current tree cover comprises a mixture of mature larch planted around 1940 (estimate) and mixed age but generally mature birch of around the same vintage along with a scatter of Scots pine. There are also some large specimens of oak and sycamore and a scatter of rowan, hazel and holly in the understorey. The tree canopy is generally open which together with the species present creates a light and airy feel to the wood. The ground flora is dominated by bracken, bramble and other ferns and there is also a strong flush of vernal species: notably a carpet of bluebells in April/may. No NVC classification has been carried out. Windblow plays a part in the development of the stand with large trees occasionally coming down in strong gales, and given the age of the larch and birch this will continue as the canopy ages. However natural regeneration of mostly birch and rowan is scattered throughout and will fill any resulting canopy gaps. The site is a possible Planted Ancient Woodland (PAWS) Site. The PAWS guidance will be used to guide its future management. There are a number of permissive paths through the site together with a public footpath on the western boundary. The southerly footpath (permissive) now forms part of the long distance Derwent Valley Heritage Way. The southerly boundary along Holly Lane is formed of spindly, drawn up, sycamore which has a tendency to overhang the road. However, it should be noted that a significant strip of land for two thirds of this boundary lies outwith the Trust's ownership and presumably lies with Derbyshire County Council Highways. A memorial tree (silver birch standard) was planted close to the southern boundary in 1996. The wood is under a Tree Preservation Order no.81976, and is recorded as a Site of Biological Importance administered by Amber Valley Borough Council and lies within a Special Landscape Area covering the upper Derwent Valley.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Access is direct from the public highway - Holly Lane in the vicinity of Ambergate (over the Derwent Bridge 200m to the west), or from the public footpath to the west. There are also various other permissive routes throughout the site, which link well with the local path network. One of the permissive routes has been included as part of the new Derwent Valley Heritage Way.

The internal paths are natural woodland paths, unsurfaced and steep as the wood lies on the face of a hillside.

Car parking facilities exist on Holly Lane across the road from the wood in an unmade layby, enabling greater use by the public.

Ambergate is well served by bus and train routes, having its own station about 500m from the wood. Travel details can be found on Traveline on www.traveline.org.uk or alternatively on 0871 222 2233. There are no known public facilities in the vicinity of the wood.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The wood is to be managed as a mixed native high forest with the retention of the mature trees into senescence. A programme of PAWS restoration involving the gradual conversion to predominantly broadleaved woodland will be carried out, with a long term aim of a return to predominantly broadleaved species. Recruitment will then take place from the good scatter of regeneration in the understorey, which at present is mostly silver birch and rowan with holly. Continuous cover of the tree canopy will be preserved together with the preservation of the wood in the landscape. The wood will continue to be managed for open public access, although the routes of some of the more minor permissive/desire line paths will change in response to trees dying and falling in the longer term.

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

The Birches is very well connected to the local path network with one public footpath on the west boundary and numerous unsurfaced permissive routes throughout the wood: the most southerly of which has become part of the newly created Derwent Valley Heritage Way. This long distance route will add to the number of visitors that the wood attracts.

The wood is nearby and linked by path to the National Trust's Shining Cliff Woods. The immediate locality was a popular location for day trips in Victorian times and up to the mid 20th century, especially when the bluebells were in bloom.

Significance

The wood provides an important link in the local network of footpaths including the newly created Derwent Valley Heritage Way

Opportunities & Constraints

The wood provides an important link in the local network of woodland walks and the creation of the new Derwent Valley Heritage Way will increase the number of visitors who will be able to enjoy this attractive woodland. Car parking availability on Holly Lane already ensures a good number of visitors. A leaflet describing the route of the Derwent Valley Heritage Way and the sites to be seen on route has been created by Derbyshire County Council.

Factors Causing Change

changes in level of useage from the Derwent Trail promotion, unauthorised mountain bike use including the creation and excavation of jumps etc. Flytipping is a regular occurence.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain the current level of visitor facilities as long as these are commensurate with the level of site useage.

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

Retain the current level of signage and path provision, and maintain paths signage and entrances on at least one occasion per year. It is likely that litter - an in particular flytipping will be a regular occurence and will require several operations per year, as will restoration of paths following unauthorised bike use.

5.2 Secondary Woodland

Description

The Birches is a planted wood: planting date (of the larch) is unknown but assumed to be mostly circa 1940. It is an attractive mixture of mature birch and larch and is well known locally as a good bluebell wood. The ground flora is indicative of the site possibly being a planted ancient woodland, with bluebells, wood anemone and wood sorrel, together with various fern species. In addition to the larch and birch that dominate the wood, are large specimens of oak and sycamore which appear to pre-date them and a scattered understorey of rowan, holly, hazel together with regeneration of the birch and rowan. The wood occupies an important role in the landscape of the surrounding area due to its high visibility and attractive nature. The immediate area has been designated a Special Landscape Area.

Significance

The wood is a very attractive local amenity and an important part of the landscape of the Derwent Valley, falling within a concentration of ancient woodland and forms part of the Shining Cliff complex of PAWS and ancient woodland. Possible old wood pasture/hunting chase. The valley at this point is designated a Special Landscape Area.

Opportunities & Constraints

Although currently, very much a larch wood, the larch will not last indefinitely. As the larch it is not regenerating on site, the wood will eventually, over a long time period, revert to a broadleaved woodland of native character with an appropriate ground flora. Currently the regeneration taking place within the wood is primarily of silver birch and rowan. The wood is also a well known local "bluebell wood".

Given the mature, if not overmature, character of the larch and birch canopy, the wood is prone to damage in high winds. The south boundary is primarily sycamore of a narrow, drawn up nature. Ideally these would be thinned out, or cut down/pruned to eliminate the overhangs on the public roadside but they are on the exposed side of the wood and form a valuable shelter. A lot of the roadside strip is also outwith the Trust's ownership in any case.

The wood forms an important part of the local landscape and is highly visible from across the valley on the main A6 trunk route.

Factors Causing Change

canopy senescence, development of natural regeneration, windblow, PAWS survey, windblow, spread of himalayan balsam

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain the current canopy into senescence and to allow the maintenance of continuous cover by the recruitment of natural regeneration into any canopy gaps left by fallen trees. Manage through a full PAWS restoration programme.

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

Depending on regeneration over the next plan period a decision will then be made over any requirement for further restoration work, be that thinning or restocking. A woodland condition assessment will be undertaken in 2019, which will guide the management over at least the period until 2024.

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	3.80	Japanese larch	1940	High forest	No/poor vehicular access within the site	Informal Public Access, Secondary Woodland	Tree Preservation Order

The current tree cover comprises a mixture of mature larch planted around 1940 (estimate) and mixed age but generally mature birch of around the same vintage along with a scatter of scots pine. There are also some large specimens of oak and sycamore and a scatter of rowan, hazel and holly in the understorey. The ground flora is dominated by bracken, bramble and other ferns and there is also a strong flush of vernal species: notably a carpet of bluebells in april/may. Natural regeneration of mostly birch and rowan is scattered throughout. The southerly boundary along Holly Lane is formed of spindly, drawn up, sycamore which has a tendency to overhang the road (a significant strip of land for two thirds of this boundary lies outwith the Trust's ownership and presumably lies with Derbyshire County Council) A memorial tree (silver birch standard) was planted close to the southern boundary in 1996.

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.